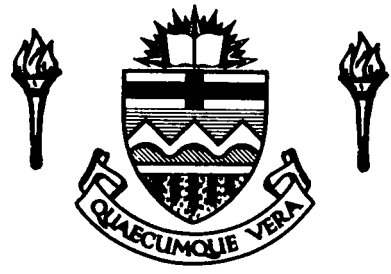
FOLD HOME

Williams

PS
8545
I285
F66
C.2

Ex libris
universitatis
albertaensis



FOLD HOME

FOLD HOME

FLOS JEWELL WILLIAMS

THE RYERSON PRESS ~ TORONTO

COPYRIGHT, CANADA, 1950, BY
THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form (except by reviewers for the public press), without permission in writing from the publishers.

Published September, 1950

NOTE

All characters in this book are entirely fictitious and any resemblance to any living person is purely coincidental.

PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

901891

"World-mothering air, air wild,
Wound with thee, in thee isled,
Fold home, fast fold thy child."

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS.

Chapter One

THE woman on the large bed in the dim room stirred, groaned, and slowly opened her eyes. Faint as the light was, she closed them quickly, deepening the wrinkles about them so that they looked like threads, drawing the brown skin into a protective hood.

Another day! Sleep possessed her again, that last sleep before waking, from which dreams tumbled and jostled; dreams of the old days, of friends dead for years. Restlessly, Lady MacKenzie flung her brown arms across the wide bed, and forced herself to open her eyes again. What a headache she had! It would be hours before she felt fit. She looked across the room to the wide windows, where awnings made a cool shadow in the brilliant autumn sunshine.

What, thought the woman, did one do with a lovely sunny day in the fall, when one was old—for today she felt very old. In youth one absorbed them—in early middle age one used them. She reached out and rang the bell at the bedside. In a few minutes a maid entered.

"Good morning, Annie!" Annie smiled. A fine old soul, thought her mistress. Whatever should I do without her? She was chirruping soothingly, patting the pillows, straightening the bed clothes.

"A little grapefruit? No? Some orange juice, then, very cold. And bacon, with an egg. It will strengthen you."

Lady MacKenzie considered. "Yes, Annie, that will be

very good; but first, lemonade—a jug of it, without sugar—an aspirin, and my cigarettes."

Deftly the bed was smoothed, the pillows arranged, and, taking up a tray with a thermos jug and glass from the bedside table, the maid turned to go.

"Is Miss Janet downstairs yet?" asked her mistress.

"She is having breakfast now, Lady MacKenzie."

"Keep her out of my room for a bit, Annie."

The old servant nodded sympathetically. She believed that married daughters should stay married, and in homes of their own.

The door closed softly, and Lady MacKenzie reached for her book, but her aching head prevented her from reading. Why had she? All day she had vowed to herself that she would not, but it was very easy to make such vows to oneself in the morning when one was just up, and bathed and dressed, feeling young and fresh, convinced that through the day something unusual and exciting would happen. But the day dragged on, trailing with it a whole life's futilities and frustrations. Then the mean little planning began, the scheming to avoid Janet's watchful eyes.

Lady MacKenzie twitched impatiently. Why should she have to scheme and plan? Was not this her house, were not these her servants, to obey her orders? But scheme she did, emboldened by the cocktails before dinner. Then Annie, with a troubled face would nod at her in understanding, and prepare her drinks for her, disguised as lemonade, bringing them to her room in a thermos jug. If Jenny ever heard of that! She chuckled as she thought of it—for all of Jenny's autocratic manner, and her insistence on good service, the servants all did three times as much for her, with no fuss at all, than they did for her daughter.

What had started it yesterday? She moved her head restlessly against the pillows when she thought of the number of drinks she had taken after she had gone to bed. Ah yes! The Old Timers Tea. That was the curse of a large house. Once her pride and joy, it had become now a burden to her, with its heating bills — its unpaid taxes, the never-ending

entertainment of distinguished visitors who came to the small western city. It had been a gay home once, when the children were all at home.

The children! She dare not think of her children. That sudden, breathless nausea still gripped her when she thought of Napier, who had died in the war—so much the best of all of them. She remembered how she used to look at him and his twin brother, Ian, in their handsome young manhood. One so dark, the other fair, and think, "There they are. If I had chosen my sons from all the world, they would have been just like that, especially Napier, with his sense of humour, his love of good music, his appreciation of literature, his understanding of his fellow men—and above all his tenderness towards me, his love for me." She had known when he left, that he would not come back.

She had borne four sons, and now Arthur and Ian were left — Arthur with his dilletante painting and writing — his laziness, his poses. At any rate, his lack of zest in living, which her other children all possessed in such marked degree, had saved him from the stresses which marked the lives of her other difficult children. Where had the fault been? Perhaps in her own dim beginnings, and how dim they were!

Strange that, as she grew older, these old memories insisted on struggling up, through half-waking dreams, like a spring in some dark forest. Fighting apprehensively against the inevitability of another day, struggling against awaking, the dreams would come. They were always troubled; a secret sought, and never quite grasped, a pool of dark memories into which she looked, that stirred with her awakening, and the picture was lost.

What *did* she remember? There was a dark, widely-smiling mother holding her—but surely that could not be, for her mother had died when she was two years old. Yet it must have happened, for her tall handsome Scotch father had been there too. There was another picture too—dream or reality, she knew not which—of being held high in the arms of a tall Indian. She could see plainly the black braids of hair, the silver earrings—could smell the buckskin clothing, and the

woodsmoke, smells which today never failed to stir her to the very depths of her being. Lately her years at school in England, holidays with her father's people in Scotland, seemed farther away than those dreams of half remembered beginnings.

Annie came in, protesting softly about the dim light by which her mistress was reading. She poured out the lemonade, which misted the glass, and the woman drank eagerly.

Alone again, Lady MacKenzie, shivering with the pain in her head, the jangle of her nerves, lit a cigarette with trembling hands. The cool smoothness of the lighter gave her pleasure. She wished that she had told Annie that she would have ham. She relished meat, after drinking. More and more, as age crept on her, she found herself, with resentment, thinking of food. Austerely she denied herself overindulgence, but this morning, feeling as she did, surely she could excuse herself for eating a hearty meal.

As Annie placed the breakfast tray in front of her, and raised the covers from the savoury dishes, she asked abruptly, "What did Miss Janet say?"

"She first asked how you were feeling, and said to tell you that she would be up in a few minutes."

"Yes?"

"And I told her that I would mention it to you, but that you had a headache, and had spoken of resting."

"You are a treasure, Annie. You know all the right answers."

The small wrinkled servant giggled, showing her false teeth like a horse. "I have been with you for a good many years; I should know them by now."

Lady MacKenzie attacked her breakfast with relish. Her headache was abating, but she had hours of empty hopelessness and self-disgust still stretching ahead of her. Her maid moved about the high-ceilinged old room, with its massive furniture, straightening toilet articles, hanging up clothes.

"The drapes, Lady MacKenzie?"

"Don't draw them—open them wide." The sun flooded the room, a breeze from the broad prairies of Alberta sweet

and fresh from the mountains, streamed into it, and turned the thoughts of the woman on the bed to her ranch. The sun would be drenching over it now, turning the foothills to gold, the mountain tops to silver. Saskatoon bushes would be burning, a purple flame, among the hills. It seemed like yesterday that her sturdy children were riding their horses across those hills, and as she had watched them the song in her heart had been as joyous as a meadow lark's. She could hear the cowboys calling—her husband shouting an order—the jangle of spurs and harness.

She winced. After all these years, the memory of her husband still had power to hurt. Had he loved her in those days at the ranch? She had thought so—had felt secure in his love and loyalty, but in the light of subsequent events, she doubted it. That had hurt most, not the losing of his love, but the gaining of the conviction that he had *never* loved her. And she—she had loved a man who had never existed, a man who had meant more to her than the husband whose success, whose quick rise to fame, and the rapid accumulation of money had ever meant.

Annie came in from the bathroom, "I've drawn your bath, Lady MacKenzie. You'll feel better, once you're up."

Slowly the small dark woman crawled out of bed. "I guess you are right, Annie. I shall get dressed, and drive out to the Ranch."

Annie looked at her from the doorway, tenderness showing on her plain face. "That's the ticket. You should spend more time at the Ranch. You're more yourself, if you know what I mean, when you are there."

"You are quite right, Annie. I have been thinking, quite seriously, of giving up this great barn of a place, and going out there to live. Would you come with me?"

"You know I'd go. It beats me why you haven't done that long ago." She trotted into the room again, busying herself by throwing back the bed covers, her back to her mistress who was seated at her dressing table.

"Lady MacKenzie, times are bad for you. I know that it's none of my business, but I hate to see you struggling

along, carrying this house on your back, like some poor snail."

Lady MacKenzie chuckled. "That is exactly what I *do* feel like, Annie."

"You've talked for the last fifteen years of selling this place, and moving out there. Then why haven't you?"

Why hadn't she? Margot MacKenzie looked at herself in the mirror, and pondered the question, as she drew her heavy black hair back, and pinned it in a knot at the nape of her neck. Her face was remarkably free of wrinkles. The fine bony structure of her face with its high cheek bones had taken care of that, but the tell-tale neck told her years. How old she was getting! Now that so many of her days were empty and unimportant, the years slipped by with increasing speed. She sat, still taking an inventory of her appearance. Her tawny arms were still as lovely as a girl's, and her figure was good. But then, a woman's arms did stay young and beautiful if one did not get fat. As for her figure, it needed clothing now, to show its beauty. She put in the last hair pin, and rose to go into the bathroom.

"Heavens, Annie," she said tartly, "Don't be an idiot. How could I have lived at the Ranch? My children wanted to be in the city when they grew up. Even after the death of my husband, as the widow of a cabinet minister, I still had duties as a hostess."

"All right, you couldn't," conceded Annie, "But what about now?"

"And what of Janet and Arthur?" Annie snorted her disgust of that question.

"Yes, you can snort—but can you picture either one of them living at the Ranch? Well, at any rate, I am going out there today. I'm not going to waste all of this beautiful fall weather. Tell Miss Janet that I won't be home for lunch."

"You haven't forgotten the dinner for those English people?" Annie asked anxiously.

"No," Lady MacKenzie smiled wryly. "I haven't forgotten. I shall be back in time. These cursed dinners, Annie. This is the last year that I shall bother with them."

"And your bridge game this afternoon?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" burst out her mistress impatiently. "Get along with your work. I'm sick to death of bridge. I'm sick to death of always having someone else's idea of a good time. Come hell or high water, I am going to the Ranch."

"Perhaps you'll get just that," cackled Annie. "The ford may be too high."

"Nonsense, you know as well as I do that the stream only floods in June. Now go along with you, and keep Miss Janet away for a bit, if you can. She'll be fussing about this dinner tonight."

Lady MacKenzie drowzed in her bath, gazing down at her still shapely legs, and her amazingly flat little stomach, as the water glinting from the sunlight that poured in at the window, dappled over her. How ashamed of her dark skin she had been before the other girls when she was at school. That was before Anglo-Saxons had become sunworshippers. She sighed wearily at the thought of the dinner she was giving that evening. There had been a time when such things had been a delight, now they were a weariness; she was too tired, too indifferent.

By nine or ten o'clock she would be bone tired, longing for her beautiful old room, her comfortable bed, a book in her hands beneath the shaded light. The first drink drove away her desperate longing for Napier, quickened her perception of what she was reading. With her second drink her mind would wander now and then from her reading, sad memories would flow through her mind—memories of the days when she and her husband were young, and in love—if he had ever loved her—of her lovers, after she knew her love had been betrayed—of her stalwart children tearing about the Ranch. She would remember people of the old crowd, of whom she had not thought in years. What fun they had had, in this booming western town where fortunes were made and lost in a matter of weeks, in land booms, and oil booms. She smiled at old remembered jokes and incidents. They had gambled, danced, drunk, made love, borne children with zest and gaiety—and they had been good neighbours, one to the

other. If only she had the strength to refrain from that third drink! With it surged through her all the grief and loneliness that Napier's death had brought to her. She would reach hurriedly for another, thinking that she must find oblivion or go mad.

Lady MacKenzie slipped out of the bathtub, feeling young and fresh. "In the course of a day, I am all ages from twenty to ninety," she thought. I suppose that is because I live in remembered time, and hope in the unknown future, when life will be over. I wish that scientists would give as much study to time as they have given to matter and space. Surely in time will be discovered the greatest of mysteries. It would be much more exciting than atoms and such like! She patted herself dry with a large, warm towel, fluffed on bath powder, gave all her attention to her grooming, over which she had always been more than meticulous, knowing in her heart a secret fear, that had to do with the smell of woodsmoke and damp moccasins.

When she entered her room again, her daughter Janet was seated in the chintz chair by the window. "Don't look annoyed," she said quickly. "I *did* knock, but you didn't hear me. I never could understand why you have always been so fussy about such things. You practically dress in the bathroom."

"I value my privacy," explained Lady MacKenzie, with dignity. "I never could understand why, because a woman marries, and has children, she should have to give that up, but it seems to be one of the first things demanded of her. However, I am happy to see you, my dear, and I must say you are looking very beautiful this morning. I marvel constantly, how I ever begat such a gorgeous daughter."

Janet looked at her mother sharply. She never knew when to take her mother literally, but she did know that she was too much a woman of the world, and had too much experience with Janet, not to know what caused the full flowering of her daughter's beauty. She contented herself with looking at her image reflected in the pier glass across the room, and was well satisfied with what she saw.

Her mother stood watching her. "You see what I mean," she chuckled. "Your beauty comes from my side of the house—the distaff side."

"Mother!" expostulated Janet, sitting erect.

"You should be proud of it," said Margot MacKenzie, coldly. "But you are that unhappy type which is never proud of the best things about them." She was indeed beautiful, this daughter of hers. Her shoulders were broad, and beautifully curved, accenting the slim hips and long slender legs. The line of her throat, to her small rounded breasts was perfection, and she carried her slender body with amazing grace. She wore her gleaming black hair in defiance of fashion, parted in the centre, and drawn back on each side of her narrow face in a knot at the nape of her neck. Her high cheek-bones, clear olive skin, and small aquiline nose betrayed her Indian blood, but her long green eyes were startling in their unexpectedness and beauty.

"About the dinner tonight, Mother," she began anxiously.

"Yes?" Lady MacKenzie was moving about in the clothes closet, looking for her hat and coat.

"These people are terribly important, you know." Janet's voice was worried.

"Unfortunately, I do know," laughed her mother, emerging from the clothes closet, hat in hand and her coat over her arm. "If they weren't, we should not have to be bothered with them. I'm weary to death of celebrities. I could scream at the sight of one. This town has gone lecture mad, and apparently there is no place for the lecturer to dine, but here."

"Well after all," argued Janet, "This is the logical place. The position Father had in the Government before he died,—"

"And the cook and house," broke in her mother.

"Who are coming?"

Lady MacKenzie sat down, facing her daughter. "I have kept it small. We must all go on to the lecture, and I did not want to have more people than our box can accommodate.

There will be, of course, Sir Brooke and Lady Denton—and Sir Brooke's secretary, a Miss Howard—a family connection of Lady Denton's. Jack Steele will be here, because he is president of the club which is sponsoring the lecture, and also because of his place in the political scene. Thank heavens his silly wife is visiting in eastern Canada. Then there will be you, Arthur, and the Bishop, God bless him. He will likely be the only bright spot at the party."

"That old goat!" scoffed Janet. "Mother, for heaven's sake, don't let him get started on his stories of the early days, or he will never stop. He will bore everyone to death."

"Indeed he will not!" cried the older woman indignantly. What fun the Bishop, even then well on in middle age, had been when she was a girl. As a younger son of a good English family, he had studied for the Church, and taken orders. Then, to save his family embarrassment, and himself boredom, he had emigrated to western Canada, and tall tales were still told of his gay life in the new country. At length, faced with choice of taking a Church, returning home, of having his remittance cut off, he had taken the little Church near her father's ranch, where on Sundays with much fervour and little conviction, he had preached to his small flock, and on weekdays, joined his parishoners in their amusements. "The dear old Bishop is always amusing," went on Lady MacKenzie. "I expect that he will be the only one at the dinner who will *not* bore Sir Brooke and Lady Denton. You are making a great mistake if you think they will prefer to listen to you talking of economics, of which you know nothing, or Arthur of art, of which he knows nothing but the patter."

Janet rose with a sigh, and holding aside the drapes with her long slender hand, looked out into the garden. "It's so difficult to find interesting dinner guests in a place like this. I'm sick to death of this little mid-western city. At any rate, I am glad that Jack Steele is coming. He, at least, can keep a conversation going."

Lady MacKenzie paused in her vague search for gloves and purse, and looked shrewdly at her daughter. "Jack

Steele is a pushing, vulgar and ambitious man, but he is neither cultured nor brilliant."

"You have always been prejudiced against him, Mother," Janet turned, and paused to light a cigarette, slipping the lighter into the pocket of her smart wool dress.

"That is my lighter, dear," her mother looked grim.

"Oh!" Janet laid it on the dressing table. "Then where is mine? I had it last night."

"I have no idea. No, I am not prejudiced." The words came slowly, for the older woman was feeling her way. "When a woman arrives at my age, and has lived as fully as I have, she outgrows prejudices, and takes people pretty much as she finds them. Jack Steele will undoubtedly go a long way in politics, and he may even reach cabinet rank, but before a man of his limited ability can do that, he must go through a training that does not make for greatness nor integrity. The spectacle, and I have seen it more than once, of an ambitious politician arriving, his fawning on superiors, frightening of inferiors, his treachery to former supporters, his sloughing of ideals, is not edifying, and Jack Steele is the climbing politician at his worst."

Janet slowly pressed her cigarette out on an ash try. Her lovely wide mouth was pressed in a straight line over her even white teeth. "He did a good war job, you must admit that!" she expostulated indignantly.

"Oh, yes, yes, I am not denying that! Once the bugles of war sounded, he quickly armed himself with a pen, leaped behind a great mahogany desk in Ottawa, and made a killing."

Janet laughed shortly. "And you say that you are not prejudiced, Mother!"

"Well then, I *am* prejudiced," conceded Lady MacKenzie, "and why should I not be? You know as well as I do that he has made his money by some of the rawest oil deals that I have seen brought off in Alberta, and I have seen some pretty raw deals in my day."

Janet's foot tapped impatiently, and her eyes blazed, then she decided to treat the whole matter lightly. "Mother, we have to admit that Jack Steele is accepted everywhere. As

for tonight, as you say, he is president of the club which is sponsoring Sir Brooke Denton's lecture, and you have to have him. At least, he is not dull, when he is in good form, and heaven knows we'll need someone tonight who is at least a man of the world. Personally, I rather like him."

The girl's mother, stung by the secret smile with which this last statement was made, spoke furiously to her daughter. "You know that he killed your brother Gordon?"

Janet turned to the window again, looking across the gardens. "You are being melodramatic, Mother, moreover, it is not fair to make such a statement as that."

"Not fair?" The older woman's voice rose. "Who was Jack Steele before he picked out Gordon, a young lad of nineteen, to flatter, in order to make contacts that would be useful to him in his promotion schemes. He taught Gordon to drink, gave parties for him, saw to it that he fell in love with that pretty, silly wife of his. He hung around our house morning, noon and night until he had met all the influential people who could be of use to him. Then when Gordon's usefulness was over, he dropped him. How often did he, or his wife come to see the boy when he was ill, and it would have given him some happiness?" Her eyes were bitter with the memory of the time when she had secretly telephoned Mrs. Steele to come and see Gordon, and she had come grudgingly.

Janet shrugged. "Mother, we all feel sorry about Gordon, but it does no good to blame others for his faults and weaknesses. I had no idea that you felt like this about Jack." A troubled frown appeared between her straight black brows. "I hope to goodness you won't show your feelings toward him tonight."

"Don't worry, my dear," smiled Lady MacKenzie, struggling to regain control of herself. "I assure you that I shall behave in what is supposed to be a civilized manner. Life has taught me to to receive knaves graciously, and suffer fools gladly, although I confess that every day I am more and more in agreement with Mr. F's Aunt."

"Mr. F's Aunt?"

"Skip it, darling. It is a touch of Dickens from my dim past."

Janet made a gesture of finality, and moved towards the door, anxious to terminate the interview, but Lady MacKenzie called her back.

"Janet!"

"Yes, Mother?" She turned and walked slowly back into the room, engrossed in taking another cigarette from her case, avoiding her mother's eyes.

"Jack Steele is a guest in my home, only on *my* invitation. No one else is to ask him here. You also know now that I disapprove of any member of my family being on terms of friendship with him."

"Mother!" Janet protested.

"I am quite serious. You are an idiot, Jenny. What you see in that man with his fat neck and tight suits is a mystery to me."

Janet flushed, and look uncomfortable. She wondered herself if it was only boredom that led to her interest in him. Under a polished smoothness, there were things about him that jarred. But what could one do when one was beautiful, thirty-three, twice divorced and condemned to live in a small mid-western city, but seek excitement wherever one could find it? If only she had money of her own, she would not stay in the place twenty-four hours. She looked at her mother speculatively. Why would she not settle an income on her only daughter, or give her the share of the estate that would come to her eventually, instead of keeping her wholly dependent on her bounty? Jack said that she could not afford it. "Your mother is nearly washed up," was the way he expressed it. Yet they lacked for nothing in their daily living.

She sat down again, facing her mother who was slowly smoothing her gloves on, as she sat in the other chair, the fireplace between them, and she felt profoundly sorry for herself. A feeling of hopelessness filled her, the hopelessness of fighting her own dark passions. It would be the same with Jack as with the others. There would be again the excitement of intrigue, the cruel driving of her fierce blood,

and then the sudden hatred and revulsion that inevitably followed a conquest. She knew instinctively that Jack Steele was not a man to be trifled with. There was a mean streak in him, and he was more ruthless than she was. It would not be beyond his code of ethics to create a scandal, if she hurt his overweening conceit, and that she could not afford, in so small a city, where her only hope of escape was an advantageous marriage.

Her mother sat watching her, love and understanding beyond the gift of most mothers bringing tears to the dark hooded eyes. Janet rose, and, going to her, stooped and kissed her. What a hell of a life her mother had had. Her marriage had not been a happy one. Napier had been killed in the war. Gordon, little more than a boy, had died an alcoholic's death. Arthur was no good—hiding his weak character and his laziness behind a dilletante interest in the Arts—with a capital "A." Ian, it was true, was a clever scientist, but he was interested in his farming experiments at the Ranch. She, certainly, had been nothing but a worry to her mother from the day she was born.

"Don't worry, Mother. Things will come out all right." She could almost feel the small slight figure in the chair radiating gratitude for her unexpected tenderness. She straightened and looked through the window to the far semi-circle of snow-capped Rockies, folded back against the clear blue autumn sky. The tall, beautiful woman felt life pulsing through her, pushing out pity. It was a perfect day to drive to the Ranch. She would see Jack. A flood of desire poured through her, and she knew that once again she was lost. She must have Jack Steele. With his heavy body, his handsome face, his hard possessive hands, and his beautiful voice that melted her heart. Her only escape, she thought, was to go away, and that was impossible.

Lady MacKenzie stood up, adjusting her fur neckpiece, and picking up her purse. Together the two women left the room, and walked slowly down the staircase, busy with their own thoughts, that were so closely connected. Lady MacKenzie never descended that staircase without a little

glow of justified pride in its exquisite proportions, the lovely flair of its curve, the beauty of the carved mahogany rail. No home in the city, even now, could boast of such a fine stairway. When it was first built, in the small, growing city, it had been a seven days' wonder. She knew that they were not for her type, but Janet, surely, was made to descend them, this tall slim handsome dark daughter of hers, with the blood of Indian chiefs in her veins.

"Do you want me to help you with your shopping?" asked Janet as they reached the lower hall. "I am playing badminton at eleven, but I am free until then. You could drop me at the club."

Her mother hesitated. "No—as a matter of fact, I am not shopping. Surely, if the cook is worth her salt, she can order what she needs. Why, I used to—"

"Oh, I know, Mother," broke in Janet impatiently. "You used to look after the management of a large house, raise a family of five children, entertain twenty people at dinner. Where *are* you going?"

"I'm driving out to the Ranch. It is such a beautiful day. The fall always makes me homesick for the Ranch," said Lady MacKenzie, annoyed with herself for adding any reason whatsoever.

"The Ranch!" cried Jenny, in consternation.

"Yes, why not?" asked her mother sharply.

"But this is the afternoon you play bridge!"

"No, Jenny dear, no bridge for me on a day like this. You must fix that up for me. Either telephone and put it off, or make a fourth yourself. I want to see Ian."

"But you always enjoy the game so much," said Janet, struggling to keep her annoyance from her voice.

"Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't. I'm tired of you and Arthur always telling me what I enjoy. This afternoon I could not sit still, one of four elderly little women chattering around a bridge table like four squirrels, holding our hands up in front of us, as if we were clutching nuts."

"I think that you are very foolish to drive all the way out to the Ranch today," said her daughter severely. "You will

come back completely worn out, and you know, Mother, these people who are coming tonight *are* important."

Lady MacKenzie sat down in a chair by the hall console, and sighed patiently. "You have said that before, Jenny. I know all about their importance, but, nevertheless, I am going to the Ranch. Will you be kind enough to ask George to bring the small car around? I shall be there in an hour or so. I shall have lunch, rest, and be back by six or six-thirty. That will give me plenty of time. We dine at seven, as we must all be at the lecture by eight-fifteen. Tell Arthur to let Annie mix the cocktails, he concocts such horrible messes, but he may look after the wine."

"Mother, I wish you wouldn't go!" broke in Janet.

"I must. For one thing, I have to talk over some business with Trevor Holland."

"That Trevor!" cried Janet, angrily. "Why can't he live in town if he is going to look after your affairs? Why should you have to go traipsing out to the Ranch to talk to him? It was alright when he was only manager of the Ranch, but now that you have turned everything over to him to handle, he should live in town. I'd watch that man, Mother. I think that you have given him far too much authority."

"Watch him!" barked Lady MacKenzie. "Jenny, you *are* a fool!"

"Well," argued Jenny, "we certainly haven't had as much money since he started looking after things."

"We certainly haven't as much to spend," her mother agreed gently. "But that is not Trevor's fault. We were spending far more than our income. We shall have to cut expenditures still more. While the cost of living, taxes, everything is soaring, the estate, which consists almost entirely of real estate, is bringing in no more in rents. As for the Ranch, it has not paid its way for years. That is what Ian is working on now. Part of it is suitable for mixed farming, if we are spared drought, hails, early frosts and grasshoppers."

"That's just it," broke in Janet eagerly. "The Ranch will

never pay by farming it, or running cattle on it. But there is one way it will pay—and that is by drilling for oil on it."

Lady MacKenzie looked at her daughter in amazement. "Nonsense, Janet. I doubt very much if we are on the structure. Moreover, no one is interested in Turner Valley anymore. It is the new fields in the north that are getting the attention."

"But there is still oil in the Valley. And we own the mineral rights on the place. We are one of the few who do down there. You never told me that."

"No," her mother said crossly. "Because I am not going to turn that place into a filthy, smelly oil field. That Ranch is going to stay in the family. It belonged to my Father. Napier loved it. Ian loves it."

Janet's green eyes blazed with anger. "So we all do without everything in order that Ian may play at farming on one of the best oil leases in Turner Valley."

Lady MacKenzie rose. "At any rate, Jenny dear, there is no use discussing all this now." Sell the Ranch—that ranch over which her children had ridden their horses—the ranch for which she had been homesick when she was at school in England—lonely and alien? The ranch where in her mind she always saw Napier—Napier on his horse, Napier laughing with her on the verandah, Napier lounging in a chair before the fire in the Big Room. The little woman stood, trembling and weak, feeling that sickening pain that flooded through her when she saw pictures of him sharply etched on her memory. She groaned inwardly, thinking she would go mad, if she did not escape from Janet. "Go away, go away!" she willed. Then a mischievous smile flashed across her face.

She moved towards the front door. "Don't bother telling George. Goodness knows where he is. I'll call and wait for him outside." She raised her head and roared, "George!"

"Mother!" hissed Jenny, her eyes blazing. "For goodness' sake! What will the servants think? I'll get George." She hurried towards the back of the house before her mother could call again. Lady MacKenzie smiled grimly, and thought angrily: "Why should I have to play some silly trick

on them in order to get my own way? Why can I not do as I please without this everlasting interference from Arthur and Jenny?"

In a few minutes the car pulled up in front of the open door. George came hurrying up the steps, cap in hand. Janet was hovering about her mother. "You *will* be back in good time, won't you, Mother?"

"Don't say it, Jenny dear," broke in Lady MacKenzie holding up her hand. "I know. These people are important." She turned to George and saw his eyes flicker and drop. She knew that her daughter had signalled her servant. Anger filled her. "I shall get away from this house," she thought. "I can stand no more of this." She turned to her chauffeur, dignity in every line of her. "I want you to drive me to the Ranch, George," she said, and started towards the car.

Chapter Two

LADY MACKENZIE settled herself, with a sigh of relief as the car swung around the gravelled drive and through the gates. Even to have their mother in the small car annoyed Janet and Arthur; they had a notion that it added to their Mother's prestige and dignity to be seen sitting alone in the back seat of the larger car.

Alone! That was the trouble. Misery enveloped the woman. For how many years of her life had she been lonely? Certainly she had been when she was at school in England, or spending her holidays with her father's people in Scotland. Her physical traits, which she owed to her Mother's people made her alien, and homesick for the Canadian West. Those few swift years after her return had been good years. How gay they had been in the growing western city, with dances at the large new hotel; wild rides across the prairie; picnics at the great ranches, their operatic society, their amateur theatricals. There had always been open house at her father's ranch, where she had first met Gordon MacKenzie, a handsome and ambitious young lawyer, and her father had enthusiastically approved their swift courtship and marriage. She had been madly in love with the man, but later she had ample cause to wonder if he had ever loved her, and after all these years the thought could still stab her heart, for she had loved him utterly. She knew now that her attraction for him had been her father's money, and his influence in the new country.

When her husband could not make her over into the pattern of what he thought his wife should be, his tongue became cruel and barbed. He could not leave her alone, for she was not the type of woman to be relegated into the background. She had grown used to his insolent remarks, so that no longer had she lain awake at night, her anger against him aflame. He had overdone his torturing, and ruined its effectiveness. With dignity she could turn him aside, leaving him with a feeling of both frustration and shame. Only once had she attacked him in a vital spot, and from that wound he had never recovered, but by then it was too late for her to care. When he had received word that he was to be knighted, he had turned to her, "There, my dear, I always said that I would make a lady of you, and I have," he said smiling, and bowing with mock courtliness. To speak such words to her, whose father had given him his start, loaned him money, sent him clients!

She could have struck him across his handsome, smiling mouth, but her days of violent scenes were over. She had made her own life in her native city, leaving him to his life in Ottawa. She was standing on the lowest step of that staircase of which she was so proud. "More than you could do for your mistress," she laughed up at him. "But then, if your knighthood would have done that for her, I should never have arranged it."

With the words, a vague nagging worry that he had scoffed at to himself became definite. Could it be possible that the man had been in love with his wife—a man more highly placed in the Government than himself? Had he the infallible, made a mistake? He had to admit to himself that it was just possible that this wife of his, for whom he always felt like apologizing, had charm for others. Of course he had always known that his secretary, Trevor Holland, was in love with her, but that had not disturbed him. So that was how it had happened! He banished his wife from Ottawa, sent Trevor back to the West to manage the Ranch. He lost all interest in women. Work and politics became his consuming passions.

The car was moving swiftly through the downtown traffic.

Lady MacKenzie moved restlessly. A long, cold Collins would be good after the drive, and she did not want to go into the supplies at the Ranch. Trevor, she thought, kept them perilously low. "I want you to pick up a parcel for me at the liquor vendor's, George," she said.

The car swerved to avoid a truck. The man's face was impassive as he gave all his attention to driving. He knew that if his mistress repeated her words, he would have to turn back. For dignity's sake, Lady MacKenzie spoke again, more distinctly. "You did not hear me, George. I wanted you to pick up a parcel for me at the vendors. We have passed the place, and I fear we shall not have time on the way back. However, it is of no importance."

The driver sighed with relief. He liked the old girl, everyone in town did, but he had promised Miss Jenny, and, after all, a man had to consider on which side his bread was buttered. She had told him that Jack Steele was going to get him a job at the armouries, and he would certainly jump at it, for he knew that his present job could not last much longer. Everyone said that the MacKenzie estate was almost on the rocks. Since Sir Gordon had died, leaving everything to his wife, the family had spent money like water. The city would have taken the house for taxes months ago, if they had known what to do with it, as they had taken the MacKenzie block. The family would lose it all yet; and it was slipping in value. Most of it was in the old section of the city, and fast falling into disrepair. Yet, here they were—with two cars, a chauffeur, a gardener, a cook, two maids. He grinned to himself. It would be something to see that twirp Arthur having to earn his living, but he'd be sorry about Ian.

It was lucky for him that she had not insisted on calling at the vendor's for liquor. It was getting a bit thick, this buying gin all the time, and he did not like being a party to her securing it. She had always liked a good party, and had drunk her share at them, but it was only since Napier's death that this secret drinking had started, Annie said again last night. They spent more money for liquor in a month in the house, than would keep his family for three. But just let *his* sort

get behind with their taxes! "Well, the day is coming," George mused. It used to be the poor who hated the rich—but now it was the rich who hated the poor. Scared, that's what they were.

He did not want to leave this place, and had a warm, protective affection for his mistress. He liked the long drives through the country which he took with her, and the day spent at the Ranch. He and his wife were lucky to have such nice living quarters over the garage, too. When he thought of the pokey little basement suites, the single shabby rooms, the crowded quarters with relatives, that so many veterans lived in, paying high rents out of their gratuities, he knew that he was fortunate. If only this job could last—but of course it could not. Lady MacKenzie liked him, and needed him. He felt like a traitor. If that daughter had dared, he knew that she would have fired him months ago. She blamed him quite rightly for buying her mother's liquor for her. And was that haughty lady a bitch! Two divorces already, and well on her way to make a fool of Jack Steele. That would not be as easy as she thought. He was a tough hombre, that one, and he would not be playing around with her if he didn't think that he was doing to get something out of it. What a lovely crook *he* was. Should be in jail, instead of Parliament.

"A beautiful day, George. Alberta is at its best in the Autumn."

George glanced at the small figure beside him, and decided that he would not tell her of his decision to leave until they were coming home.

"There's no place like it, Lady MacKenzie."

"Every fall I wish that we were living on the Ranch. The shooting season used to be the happiest time of the year for us. Of course you don't remember when prairie chickens were so plentiful that every stook of wheat would have birds on it. We never thought then that the time would come when there would be closed seasons for them. Sometimes I think that I shall give up the place in town and settle in the country. I was talking to Annie about it this morning."

"And why not, Lady MacKenzie?"

The woman sighed. "Janet and Arthur dislike the country, and I could not afford to keep up both places. This nagging need of money. I don't suppose that I shall ever be free of it again."

George thought of his mother, a girlhood friend of his employer, thought of her work, and worry, and struggles to raise her family after his father had died, and forced himself to cluck sympathetically. They were in the open country now, and far as the eye could see, the golden fields lay beneath the brilliant sun—red gold of wheat, the tawny gold of flax, the silver gold of oats. In some fields where grain had been cut, the crop was so heavy that shadow rested on stook and stook on shadow, in others combines were working, while still over vast acres, the breeze rippled sun and shadow across the tall grain. Miles away, tall elevators rose like exclamation marks against the vivid blue of the sky, and the smell of ripe wheat was heavy in the air. Poplars along the river bank beat out golden light, shaking their quivering gold pieces against a lifting breeze. The great valley lay, with its wine, red and purple brush, its golden grain, like a vast bowl of fruit enclosed in the frosted crystal of mountain tops.

Before long, they were approaching the foothill country, the grain fields left behind. Far to the south and west, the long low hills lay folded in layers of light, and here and there could be seen the flicker of gas flares from the oil fields, as if the vibrant light had burst into flame. There, crouched among the hills was the Ranch, where Lady MacKenzie had spent the happiest years of her life. She had inherited the place from her father, and her husband had been proud to keep it up, a showplace in the country, dispensing, as in the old days, the lavish hospitality of the West, for it served to identify him as a real Westerner to his constituency. Here, the children had lived when they were small. Their mother could see them now, in her memory, their sturdy young bodies astride their ponies. No Indian had ever sat a horse more easily than the twins, but, by that time, she dare not mention such a thing to her husband. Already he was putting much of his life behind him, although her turn had not yet come. His

restless impatience with her had come later, when they had gone to Ottawa during the sessions.

Lady MacKenzie moved restlessly, and lit a cigarette. When one became older, was it impossible to have memories that were not a stab in one's heart? From that first session in Ottawa, whenever she had gone with her husband, she had seen her happiness flow from her, steadily, unabatingly. Had it not been for Trevor Holland, the young secretary whom her husband had taken with him from his Calgary law office, those months in Ottawa would have been bleak indeed. Coming from the West, the daughter of a wealthy rancher, to whom the new country owed much, she was unprepared to find herself the victim of a stupid snobbery, because of her Indian blood, common enough among the "old timers" in the new land. At the time she did not know that it had been inspired by a woman with whom her husband had fallen in love. Because of the position of this woman's husband, the socially ambitious had followed their leader. What unhappy bewildered years those were! Had it not been for Trevor, she was quite sure that the snubs she had endured and her husband's neglect would have crushed her utterly. She shivered in the sharp, clear air. She must pull a shutter down on those memories. She forced herself to think of Trevor, and it was as if she wrapped herself about with a warm cloak.

"Cold?" asked George solicitously, turning up the window.

"No," she smiled. "Leave it open—just a ghost walking over my grave."

The car was well into the foothill country now. Sloughs, white edged with alkali, and dotted with wild ducks gleamed in the morning sun, reflecting the clear, cerulean blue of Alberta skies. Coveys of Hungarian partridge whirred across the road every few miles.

"The little beggars!" laughed George. "Dozens of them today, but just wait until the season opens tomorrow. I think they look at the calendar."

"George, we must have some shooting parties," cried Lady MacKenzie, sitting erect and looking about her. "A few

people from town. The time has been too long since we have had people at the Ranch. I have been selfish in my grief. A day's shooting and dinner—all home-raised food. City people like that. You and I shall come out and stay for a week or two. It will give you a bit of a holiday and some good sport. We shall fill the 'deep freeze' and have plenty over for you and your mother. I shall entertain the neighbours, too, a real old hoe-down party. We used to have such wonderful times here. How Napier loved the place!"

George was startled. It was the first time he had heard her mention her son's name since he had been killed. He remembered his mother telling him of the still despair of her lifelong friend, then this drinking had started—first with gay parties, at the Big House in town, but they had not been the way of forgetfulness and the lone drinking had begun.

"Yes," Lady MacKenzie continued enthusiastically. "Next week we shall come out, George, and stay for a time. We shall make the Ranch gay again. Napier would like that."

George squirmed, and then decided to get it over. "I'm afraid, Lady MacKenzie—you see—it's this way."

His mistress looked at him in alarm.

"I have had on offer. The way I figure, we are bound to have a depression. With prices what they are, all the average man can buy now, once his war savings have gone, is food and not much else. So factories making things won't get orders, and they'll close down, and men will be out of work, and will buy less, and more men will be out of work. Same old thing, all over again. The trouble is that the men at the top haven't enough imagination to conceive of solid citizens lacking enough money to buy food and clothing for their families." He laughed shortly.

"I tell you, every politician should have to spend a year in social welfare work before he can run for Parliament. They don't know the way the majority of people have to live, how they have to scheme and plan and do without, just to get by. They spent time fussing about Canada Day, or Dominion Day, Rule Britannia, or no Rule Britannia, a flag of our own, or no flag of our own. Who the heck cares? What they

should be thinking about is 'How is the average mass of the people getting along?' "

The dark, little woman beside George listened to this tirade impassively. She wondered if the man were a Communist, and did not care, one way or the other. She was merely bored with George's financial worries—with everyone's financial worries, even Sir Stafford Cripps'. All she knew was that she had plenty of her own.

"Are you telling me that you are leaving me, George?" she asked gently, after a slight pause.

"Yes," he answered bluntly. "You've been good to me, and I've liked working for you. I'm sorry to leave. But this job that I have been offered is a Government job at the armouries. There will be a pension at the end of it. That's about all people in my class ask for now; security. I'm a comparatively young man, but I lived through a war, depression, and another war. Men in my position—and we make up the vast number in any country—are getting to the stage where we say 'You can take your other freedoms—all I desire is freedom from want.' "

Lady MacKenzie's generous mouth tightened in anger. This was more of Jenny's interference. Jack Steele had, of course, arranged it. "I shall be sorry to lose you, George," she said quietly. "It has been a comfort to have the son of an old girlhood friend working for me. I have not been half as good to you as you have been to me. I shall miss our long drives." She turned and smiled warmly at the man. "I don't blame you at all, George. You are doing a very sensible thing."

That Jenny! Anger filled the woman. What would she do without George? She had known his mother and father in the old days. George had played with her boys. It had been a comfort to have one who did not fit into the employer-employee relation to drive the car for her. She had been looking forward to the long drives they took in the autumn. They were her greatest pleasure, for she loved the golden days of that season with the early sunsets blazing across the high opalescent sky—the smoky evenings, with the smell of wheat

filling the sharp air. Did young people never realize how quickly the pleasures of life disappeared after one reached her age? Then her years took toll even of her anger. Nothing really mattered very much.

The car reached the last high stretch of the road before it dropped down to ford the river that flowed past the Ranch House. Below them the brown log building sprawled in the warm sunshine that filled the valley. The woman gazed across her land, murmuring as she always did, "The cattle on a thousand hills." Purple red Saskatoon bushes lay on the golden slopes like wine stains, and dark pines along the edge of the shallow turbulent river towered to the deep blue sky. Here was something that never failed her, unchanging, yet ever changing in the renewed beauties of each season. This was the place where she had known love and happiness, where her children had played in a wonderland of their own, safe for a few short years from a dangerous world. This home she would keep for them, and especially for Ian, for this was where his heart was. It was inheritance enough for them; the rest could go.

Lady MacKenzie's dark eyes narrowed as she turned her gaze to the Ranch House again. A car was drawn up in front of the wide verandah, shattering the brittle sunlight into points of light that stabbed the eyes.

"George!" she cried in consternation. "There is a car there. The day is ruined. But who on earth could it be?"

"Looks like Steele's car," answered George, squinting his eyes. "He's the only man in town with a bus like that."

"Jack Steele? Nonsense!" she peered through the sun again with her deep set dark eyes. If that was Jack Steele's new convertible, and it certainly looked like it, no wonder Janet had tried to keep her from coming to the Ranch. No doubt she herself had planned to drive out. She chuckled softly as she thought of Jenny playing bridge with three of her mother's friends, when she had planned a different afternoon.

"George, why on earth would Jack Steele drive out here?" she asked anxiously, for an unknown fear had come out of the

morning, chilling her. "I dislike that man intensely, and he knows it, so that his coming here without an invitation from me is a great impertinence on his part. And he must be very sure of himself about something," she added to herself.

George had a very good idea as to what might have brought Steele. There must have been some mix-up and Miss Janet and he had evidently got their wires crossed. The car slipped down the hill to the ford, churned through it with the water streaming down its sides in showers of diamonds, and pulled up in front of the house behind Jack Steele's long, low-swung convertible.

Chapter Three

A FAIR, heavily-built man rose from a large wicker chair on the verandah and waved gaily.

"Hi!" he called, starting down the steps to the gate. "You're early." Then he paused in astonishment as he saw George help Lady MacKenzie from the car. He continued his way, more slowly, towards the gate.

"Good morning, Lady MacKenzie. This is a pleasant surprise. Janet did not tell me that you were coming too." He tried to make his voice sound genial. The small erect woman nodded coldly, ignoring his outstretched hand as she walked quickly up the path, and mounting the steps, settled herself in her favourite chair, as she handed her hat, gloves and purse to George.

"Jenny could not come," she explained, sitting back. "She is playing badminton this morning, and has a bridge game this afternoon." She could hardly repress a smile as she added. "Has she not telephoned? I am almost sure that she has been trying to get you in order to explain."

Jack Steele ran his finger around his collar where the thick pink flesh bulged. "She may have been," he said. "I've been roaming around the corrals."

"Ah," nodded Lady MacKenzie. "That explains it. Wong refuses to answer the telephone." She sat back and closed her eyes, trying to capture the peace the Ranch always brought her, which had been shattered by this man's presence.

Jack Steele sat looking across the vast stretch of land, annoyance in his hard blue eyes. He knew that Lady MacKenzie disliked him heartily, and that, of late years, she asked only her most intimate friends to the Ranch. Why had Jenny let him in for this? If her game was to broadcast their friendship, and get him drawn into the family circle, she had better think again. She was just smart enough to know that he was getting someplace now, but she need not think that she was travelling all the way with him; not unless she could swing this deal. If it was not going to be oil for him it would have to be politics, and in that case he would have to watch his step. Not that he wasn't crazy about her. The very thought of her and her strange beauty, her lovely slender body, drove him almost mad with desire. She had class, too, but in Canadian politics a man got along better if he did not get his private life messed up. Janet's father might have been Prime Minister if he had not made a fool of himself over that mistress of his.

Lady MacKenzie opened her dark eyes. "Are others coming, Mr. Steele?" A grim smile broke across the woman's dark face.

Jack Steele flushed. "He'll soon be fat," thought Lady MacKenzie, noting the tight suit. "I suppose Jenny, in desperation, has decided that she will marry him and live in Ottawa. Well, she never will—not if I know that brazen huzzy, his wife. She will never divorce him!"

The man crossed his thick legs and leaned forward in his chair, looking bewildered. "Jenny said something about bringing a friend out to the Ranch today, and suggested that I bring along Dick Watson, an old friend of mine, from Tulsa."

His explanation was interrupted by Wong, the Chinese cook, who came hurrying out to greet his mistress. Wong had lived on the Ranch for so many years that his mistress had lost count.

"Nice day! Very nice day! Good day you come out to Ranch. Nice sun." His skeleton-thin face beamed a welcome.

"It is beautiful, Wong," agreed his mistress. "You and I,

at least, have never tired of the Bar X. How many years have you been here?"

Wong broke into a high, cackling laugh. "Fifty years—maybe more, maybe not. You come out here, missy, and live again. I cook good things for you. You get fat. You stay for lunch? Yes? Nice chicken. Mr. Steele stay for lunch? Yes?" The Chinese bustled about, patting cushions and straightening awnings.

Lady MacKenzie sat, her elbows resting on the arm of her chair, her fingers interlaced. "Perhaps I may, Wong. And now, will you please look after the Collinses?"

Wong disappeared into the house, and in a moment or two his mistress followed him to the kitchen.

"Wong," she asked. "When did these men come?"

"About ten, Missy. Other man walks all around Ranch. Not back yet."

The woman sighed. Her day was ruined, and there was nothing to look forward to but her dreary dinner party, and a dreary lecture in the evening. No wonder Jenny had been upset when she learned that her mother was leaving for the Ranch. What could the girl see in that coarse man? Perhaps just that. Well, it was not worth another row. "Did Miss Jenny telephone Mr. Trevor that you would have guests for lunch?"

Wong nodded. "Last night she telephoned."

Always doing things behind her back, Lady MacKenzie thought petulantly. "Very well, Wong, you had better mix the drinks, and George will serve them."

George had disappeared. She could hear his voice at the back of the house, talking to some of the ranch hands. She sighed heavily. With George gone, it would not be the same. It had meant much that he was the son of an old friend, for "the old timers" stuck together, an aristocracy in an almost classless society; an aristocracy made up of people who had endured hardships and poverty, worked for what they had acquired, who had comforted and helped one another in trouble and sorrow, rejoiced in each other's happiness and success, gossiped, laughed, quarrelled, and played together.

The very rigours of their early lives had perhaps made them too anxious to spare their children the hardships which had contributed so much to their own stalwart and rugged characters. Certainly she was sure that she and her husband had failed in innoculating in their children any sense of responsibility; only Ian had that.

With George and Annie about, and Ian and Trevor at the Ranch, life had been just bearable in that great house in town, since Napier's death. It would be pleasanter for herself if she could live at the Ranch and she tried to make herself believe that she would do so, but she knew how weak she was where her children were concerned. By no stretch of the imagination could she picture Arthur or Jenny living here. If only they would get work of some kind—relieve her of the heavy drain their demands made on her dwindling resources. Oh, it would be good to be here again, spending long quiet days in these foothills that rolled to the great ramparts of the Rocky Mountains. All she asked of life now was peace, and some measure of contentment. There could be evenings with a book before the fire—a nightcap—she would not *want* to drink much out here—a shared bed, and dreamless sleep. She stopped in her thoughts, startled. That last idea had crept in unbidden and was most unexpected. At her age! And yet, why not? Companionship was sweet, as one grew old. She and Trevor Holland should have been married years ago. If they married now, Trevor would be assured of his proper place in the family, and Jenny and Arthur would have to treat him with the respect that was his due. Since she had turned over to him the management of her affairs, and he had curbed their extravagance, she had, at times, blushed at their studied rudeness to him. They were too disinterested, or too stupid to know that he had pulled them back from the verge of bankruptcy. What a mess she had made of everything!

Lady MacKenzie turned to leave the room. "Mr. Holland isn't about? If he comes in, have him join us."

Wong became excited. "Mr. Trevor's gone to Double

Circle. Stay all day—stay for lunch. Mr. Ian, too. Big, big party."

Lady MacKenzie paused at the doorway laughing. "What on earth are the Lacey's celebrating today? It can't be a wedding anniversary or a birthday, or I'd be there. Is it the American market? I doubt if he makes the cost of the party out of that."

Wong giggled. "No, no. Mr. Lacey's rich man now. He sold ranch to big oil company. They're spudding in today."

"Spudding in?" she cried in consternation. "Oh, Wong—not spudding in at the Double Circle?"

The Chinese nodded happily, delighted at the impression his words had caused. "Soon be big derricks all over—" he said, waving a bottle of soda water in a wide gesture. "This ranch next, I think."

Lady MacKenzie's face grew hard, and her dark opaque eyes blazed. Wong grinned, remembering her fierce temper as a child.

"Not this ranch, Wong," she said grimly, feeling in her pocket for her cigarette case. "As long as I live, this ranch stays as it is. Tom Lacey is a fool." She lit her cigarette with hands that trembled. "How could he allow that lovely old place to be turned into a welter of mud, oil and flares, clanking pipes, snorting engines, derricks?"

Wong looked at his mistress aid shook his head. A wave of pity for her swept through him. How things had changed for her! They had all been so gay and happy in the old days. He had loved every minute of it, establishing himself in the family as a character, and a trusted servant, shouldering extra work when the house was full of guests, with a shrug, proud that his cooking was appreciated by so many of the great ones of the country. It was different now. He seldom had an opportunity to show what he could do. He was an artist, eager to create, and prevented from doing so. When he did get a chance, Mr. Trevor was always nagging at him for being so extravagant. Mr. Lacey was rich again. Missy would be rich again, and he, Wong, could make up heavenly dishes, and never count the cost.

"Mr. Lacey rich man now," he reminded his mistress.

"Rich nothing," she said indignantly, smoking furiously. "The promoters will be the rich men. I have seen enough of the oil game to know that."

So had Wong, for he, too, had suffered from former oil booms, but he saw what Lady MacKenzie did not—that the industry was no longer a young, fly-by-night gamble, but a great established industry run on business methods. And he wanted to cook, with plenty of good food with which to do it. He longed to see them indulging in their old lavish spending. They must be very poor now. George had told him that he was leaving, and that could only be because Missy could not afford to keep him. "Mr. Lacey rich right now," he called after his mistress as she turned to go. "He's serving lunch today to a hundred, maybe more." He slammed the glasses on a tray.

Lady MacKenzie passed through the hall to the verandah, and sat down again. Jack Steele was not there. He had, she supposed, gone to meet his friend and warn him that not Janet, but her mother was at the house. The man from Tulsa was, of course, an oil man. So that was Jenny's game now. She wanted her mother to sell the Ranch, for the sake of the oil rights, or at any rate sell the lease and ruin the Ranch. They were precious rights, which not half a dozen people in that end of the Province owned, a heritage from the old days when mineral rights, thought of as gold and silver, and later coal, of which there were vast quantities in the Province, were the only minerals that people valued.

Jack Steele had put Jenny up to this. And what was she to do? She knew that everyone would think her lucky to get an offer, with oil fields all over the Province. She needed the money badly, there was no question about that. Her financial situation, when last she had talked to Trevor, had appalled her. She had not told Janet and Arthur about it, for she knew it would be useless, and she was also ashamed of herself, for having handled her affairs so recklessly. Jenny had thought of everything. She must have known that Trevor would be at

the Double Circle party, when she arranged to meet Jack Steele and his friend at the Ranch.

The woman sat, letting her eyes rest on her beloved hills, the distant semi-circle of mountain peaks, apparently so near, and bright in the morning sun. Little whirlwinds of dust tore across the land, spiralling in a frenzy and coming to nothing. Two cowboys, nonchalant and at ease, were silhouetted on their horses against the clear blue sky. Sharply it was borne in upon her that her salvation for the years left to her depended on her return to this, her old home. Here she could find again that core of righteousness and strength which she had once had. Without recapturing that, futility, loneliness and pettiness would engulf her. But how was she to accomplish her return? She had to have money for Jenny and Arthur, if she gave up the town house, and yet, it was only by selling the Ranch that she could get money. One thing was certain—if she sold the mineral rights, she would sell the land as well. If it was to become nothing but a source of money to her, then they must take all of it, for she would have no further interest in the place.

Lady MacKenzie sighed deeply, as she adjusted a cushion at her back. The smudgy lids, like crinkled tissue paper, closed over the dark eyes, shutting out the strong light. For a moment she dozed, utterly weary of the problems, then straightened up with a start as she heard footsteps coming up the path. Jack Steele and his friend mounted the steps, their voices ceasing abruptly as they became aware of their hostess on the verandah.

"Lady MacKenzie," said Jack. "This is Mr. Watson, from the States, of whom I was speaking. Dick is an old friend of mine."

Lady MacKenzie's sharp eyes took in the man at a glance as she held out her hand. He was tall and fair, and thin almost to emaciation. His clothes were too dapper—the broad-brimmed hat in his hand betrayed the western oil man—the wide, humorous mouth, and sharp eyes, the gambler. She had seen the type often. Such men appeared in Calgary for every oil boom.

"Have you been in Alberta before, Mr. Watson?" she asked.

She caught Jack Steele flashing a warning glance at his friend as he broke in. "Dick has been in Western Canada several times, and has large interests in the American West."

"Ranching?"

"No," answered Dick Watson. "Not ranching, but I have seen a good deal of ranch life. When your daughter suggested that Jack bring me out to the Bar X—I jumped at the chance. You have a wonderful place here, Lady MacKenzie. There aren't many of the real old ranches left."

"It was wonderful once," she shrugged. "Now it barely pays its way. We have only a handful of men, run only a few hundred cattle."

The man sat down. Jack Steele's eyes were shifting watchfully between his friend and his hostess. Dick Watson, resting his elbows on his knees, twirled his hat between his fingers. At his hostess's words he looked up smiling. "The days of the big ranches are over now. It's big business, like everything else, and the little man can't compete. From what Jack tells me, you are one of the lucky ones, with a way out. You own the oil rights on the place. There should be oil here. I've just been having a look around." He drew out his cigarette case and held it out to his hostess. Jack Steele rose, and stooping over Lady MacKenzie, offered her a light. Their eyes met, each taking the other's measure, now that the case was stated, then the woman's eyes dropped to the lighter in the man's hand. It was Jenny's. So she had been out until after four with Jack Steele, and his wife was in Toronto. Poor Jenny! What a fool she was, always getting involved with the wrong man. She would have to get her away. The girl could not live down another scandal if she ever hoped to make anything of her life. Jack, following her eyes, clicked the lighter shut, and slipped it into his pocket. He was furious with himself, not even Lady MacKenzie was more anxious to avoid a scandal in his constituency than he was. When he lit his cigarette, he had his own lighter in his hand.

George came out, carrying the tray of Collinses. As he held

it before his mistress he surreptitiously indicated her glass with his forefinger. She looked up and was amused to see him solemnly wink at her. She tasted her drink. Lemon and soda! Wong and George had been plotting in the kitchen again. They meant well, but she wished that her servants were not always trying to do her some good.

Dick Watson and Jack raised their glasses to their hostess, and tossed down their drinks. George refilled them.

"Yes," said the man, his pale narrow eyes squinting across the land. "There should certainly be oil here. They're spudding in at the Double Circle today."

Lady MacKenzie frowned. "Thank heaven there are hills between their place and ours," she said sharply. "Whatever persuaded Tom Lacey to ruin that beautiful old place of his by turning it into a filthy, smelly oil field, I can't imagine."

Jack Steele rose and moved nearer the others, sitting on the railing of the verandah. "He was broke," he said flatly. "Old timers like Tom Lacey and yourself have been hard hit. Your money is in property—farms that suffer from drought, ranches with cattle on them for which you can't pay the high price for feed—city property—the old low-rent districts—your large houses to keep up—taxes eating up everything. Tom Lacey was feeling the pinch and has got out when the getting was good."

The woman moved restlessly, her pretty little dark fingers beating a tattoo on the arms of her chair. Taxes! She hated the word. So far, the city had been patient. "Yes," she agreed. "Times have been difficult for us, but they will get better. The price of beef is going up all the time—there is the American market—rent control is bound to come off residential property."

Jack laughed scornfully as he turned his glass slowly against the sun, watching the light split into rainbows. "I'm afraid, Lady MacKenzie, that they will be a lot worse before they are better. If people haven't cashed in on the good times by now, I don't think that they are going to. Tom Lacey did a wise thing. I happen to know that the City Council is going to crack down on property owners whose taxes are in arrears.

They have let some people get away with murder, but not any more. The City needs the money too badly."

Lady MacKenzie looked up and met the man's pale blue eyes. They were round and hard, like the glass alleys her boys used to play with. She felt her heart skip a beat, and dared not think how far the MacKenzie estate was behind in its taxes. She knew that this man had it in his power to ruin her, for he was a force to be reckoned with in civic affairs. It was the extravagance of the whole family, herself included, which had got her into this position. If only she had put her affairs in Trevor's hands sooner! Jack Steele was still talking, and she forced herself to listen. A habit that she had lost in the past few years. Since Napier's death, she had prayed constantly, "Oh Lord, don't let me think!"

Jack had caught Lady MacKenzie's quick flash of apprehension. He wanted to frighten her, but not antagonize her. That shot about taxes had gone home.

"You see, Lady MacKenzie, it's all this social welfare that is playing the devil with things," he growled. "As long as people expect the Government to look after them, we're going to be taxed until we're ruined."

Lady MacKenzie saw George's jaw tense as he moved quietly about refilling the glasses, emptying ashtrays, and she felt profoundly sorry for him. She knew the struggle his mother had had, the bitterness she felt because one of her sons had found his first economic security, his first job, by paying for it with his life.

"We can hardly let people starve in our midst, or die for lack of medical care, can we?" she asked coldly. "That happened in the last depression, you know, and don't say that relief was granted, and howl about what that cost. The relief was inadequate, for the recipients got only a very small fraction of the total cost. The information I received about that was very illuminating."

Dick Watson laughed—a sharp bark—and leaning forward, watched his friend with twinkling eyes. Jack flushed. He had had a finger in *that* pie, too, and had pulled out some juicy plums. He rose impatiently and moved back to his chair.

"The whole idea is wrong," he said sharply. "People just sit back and expect the Government to take care of them. It is ruining the people."

Lady MacKenzie looked at the man and shrugged. "And what is this Government of which you speak, Jack? If Canada *is* a democracy—and that is a fact which is constantly dinned into us—then surely the Government is a body of men elected by the people, to look after their well-being. As for the money which the Government has, where does it come from except from the people? If I turn my money over to an agent, or a trust company to look after it for me, then surely I am not asking too much of the trustees if, when I am sick or hungry, or without shelter, I ask for some of my funds to provide these necessities for me. I certainly should not consider that he was doing me a great favour, nor, indeed, being unduly paternalistic—a word in great favour just now—in giving me what is mine, to provide for my urgent needs."

Jack Steele sat forward abruptly, and the wicker chair creaked in protest. "I still maintain that people should not get what they don't work for," he said impatiently. "It's bad for them; the whole thing is wrong."

The woman looked up, mock horror in her face. "Why, Jack Steele, don't tell me that you are a Communist!" she cried.

Jack's friend cackled and stretching his figure to an obtuse angle, leaned back, a broad grin on his face. This was good. Lady MacKenzie looked at him startled. "He's like a vaudeville artist," she thought. "Every time he laughs, he imitates some bird or animal. I suppose he will whinny next time. I'd like to hear it."

Jack's face had reddened and his fat neck swelled like a turkey-cock's. He had had many insults hurled at him in his ruthless climbing, but no one had ever before hurled so offensive a one as this.

"Me—a Communist!" he exploded.

"But Jack," purred Lady MacKenzie. "You surely don't think that capitalism means that everyone works for what he gets, do you? If people were to receive only that for which

they work, I'm afraid our whole financial system would come tumbling about our ears. Goodness knows, it's creaking and tottering enough as it is. I have lived well, all my life, on rents and mortgages, and have never done a real day's work. You surely aren't suggesting that I have worked for the oil, which your friend here thinks is under this land. We must be consistent, whether we are talking of the rich or the poor."

A quick look passed between the two men. There had been a great deal of talk, but it was not getting any place. Talk about Reds—the old girl sounded like one herself. They'd be rowing in a minute. He flushed angrily, realizing that he was handling the business badly, and Dick knew it and was enjoying it. He had intended to lead up to the subject of drilling on the Bar X Ranch tactfully. Jenny had warned him that her mother would be difficult. Well, now that the subject had been thrown right into his lap, he would have to take it up. He would have liked the opportunity of using those high pressure arguments for which he was justly famous, to approach matters by devious twistings and turnings. But there was that grinning idiot, Dick, enjoying the situation, and waiting for him to make a beginning. He slowly lit a cigarette. How the devil had they got on to Communism? He tried to make his voice sound casual.

"Speaking of oil, Lady MacKenzie, that is Dick's line. He is up here looking over some prospects. When he met Jenny the other day she suggested that he come out and see what he thought of the possibilities here."

Lady MacKenzie turned her dark eyes to him. "You are a geologist?"

"No, Ma'am. As a matter of fact, I've been interested in promoting several oil companies in the States, so Jack and your daughter suggested that I come out today and look over this property. I have been in this game for years, and what I have seen this morning would certainly lead me to believe that you are on the structure. Of course, that would be for a geologist to determine."

"And what do you think?" she asked, turning to Jack.

The man had been surprised at her quick interest. Jenny

had led him to believe that she might refuse to discuss the subject with him at all, but he, knowing the state of her business affairs better than she did herself, had been confident that she would talk of it if a bit of pressure was applied. He had, with satisfaction, seen her wince when taxes were mentioned. If only Dick would leave the handling of her to him. Soon she would imagine that she had the only oil land in Alberta.

"Well," he spoke cautiously. "Nothing has been proven this far West. The whole thing, of course, would be a gamble. This valley is petering out."

"There have been some pretty big wells drilled in this valley," Margot MacKenzie reminded him.

"But not right around here."

Lady MacKenzie nodded her small head which age had improved by bringing out its beautiful bone structure. "You will forgive me for suggesting it, but it seems to me that you two are very foolish to put thousands into a well down here, now that the new fields which are opening up north every day are being proven. And I agree with you that the risk would be great."

The two men exchanged a quick glance. Jack Steele hitched forward in his chair, ready to launch into some high pressure salesmanship for his idea. His friend threw back his head and whinnied, resolved to take a hand in the discussion. The infallible Jack did not know his customer. This woman would never enter into a dishonest deal, unless you could persuade her that it was honest. He broke in quickly.

"I agree with you that there have been mighty good wells drilled in the valley, and there is no reason to believe that there won't be more, we shall leave that for the geologist to say. No, Lady MacKenzie," he rose and began walking up and down the verandah hands in pocket. "As Jack says, though, it will be something of a gamble. You ask why we don't buy up leases in the north," he faced her, smiling down at her in a frank and disarming way. "We just haven't the money—we have left it too late. The prices have risen fantastically." He sat on the edge of a nearby chair, and

leaned towards her. "Our idea is to form a very small company. We will put the shares on the market—and with that money we shall be in a better position to get into the game around Edmonton. You can come along with us and re-invest, or keep the money you get from the sale of your shares."

"You mean that you don't intend to drill here?" asked Lady MacKenzie indignantly.

"Oh yes, yes," both men assured her hurriedly. "The point is, we use the money we make from this well to finance drilling in the new field."

It sounded sensible enough to Lady MacKenzie. "Well what are your suggestions, gentlemen?" she asked softly. She had wanted her voice to sound brisk and business-like. For a moment she had resolved to sell the Ranch—fascinated by the idea of all her financial worries slipping from her. Janet would be sent away before she made a fool of herself again—the taxes could be paid on the estate—there would be money to refurnish the house—to buy a badly needed new car. She was too old to learn how to be poor. But suddenly to her mind came a picture of Napier laughing as he laughed on this very verandah. She could see the waves in his hair as they spread from the widow's peak on his forehead, see the tiny mole above his left eyebrow, the twinkle in his hazel eyes as they met hers, sharing a private joke with her. It was always at the Ranch that she felt close to Napier, where she was not distracted by the petty worries of life in town. And what of Ian? She sensed that she would lose something of both Napier and Ian if she could no longer come here. The feeling of desolation and futility swept over her. Of what use was money and the things it would buy—what use was life itself in a world in which there was no Napier. One vivid memory of her son such as she had just had was worth a fortune to her. She felt that she would in some way betray him, as well as Ian, if she let the place go. And yet, what else could she do?

Jack Steele sat up briskly, as she asked her question, and took a drink. He almost smacked his lips with satisfaction.

This was something like it. From now on *he* would take control of the conversation.

"The first thing, of course, is to get a geologist's report. I know a good man. If that is satisfactory, we would buy this parcel of land from you." He tossed off the remainder of his drink, and set his glass down carefully on a table. "I think that would be the best way to handle it, don't you, Dick?"

Dick Watson suppressed a desire to grin. Of course, that would be the best way to handle it. Steele would pull out of the deal with the Bar X *and* a pocket of money.

"Yes," he agreed. "I think that would be the way to handle it. Lady MacKenzie would not want the land if we drilled on the place. There might be a derrick at the back door!" He resolved that, smart as Jack Steele was, he couldn't outsmart Dick Watson. He would see to it that he got a share in the Ranch.

"And how much money would I get?" the woman held her breath, almost hoping the amount would be too negligible to tempt her.

"That, of course, would depend on the geologist's report. Part payment, or all if you preferred—and I imagine you would, as the returns would be greater—would be in shares in the company, which we would float, say we'd call it MacKenzie Consolidated, which I am confident would soon double or treble in value on the exchange. I don't need to assure you that as you and Jenny are friends of mine, I would look after your interests closely."

Margot MacKenzie smiled her appreciation. "And," she thought, "oddly enough, he will look after our interests. We shall make money on these shares." The losers would be the buyers, who had confidence in Jack Steele's luck and business judgment, in the MacKenzie name. She was sick with disappointment. If she did not accept this offer, she faced ruin —ruin for Janet, for Arthur, for herself—the three weak ones of the family. Yet she knew that it was just one more of Jack Steele's dishonest deals. To betray Ian, and his plans for the Ranch, to betray Napier and his love for the place—

for such a scheme as this! She sat very still, her dark triangular-shaped eyes almost closed.

With that uncanny sixth sense Steele had in such situations, he realized that the atmosphere had changed. He would bring the talk to an end, and let Janet work on her. What had happened? He could have sworn that for a few minutes the woman had been all for it—then something had made her change

"Well," he cried cheerily, "it's too fine a day to spend it in talking business. Think it over, Lady MacKenzie, and then we'll discuss the details. Dick and I are ready to start things, just as soon as you give the word. We must work fast, though, as Dick is returning to the States soon, and we'll have to have everything settled by then."

George came out and announced lunch. Margot MacKenzie rose with alacrity, smiling with relief. "I shall let you know within the next few days," she said. "As you say, the day is too lovely for further business."

Immediately after lunch the two men left. They were going over to the Double Circle, and Lady MacKenzie was glad to see them go. She sat on the verandah in the sun, and gazed over the rolling land. This foothill country was in her blood. If she gave up the Ranch, she had nothing left to which she could look forward. It was like an anchor to her. Without it she would simply drift along into a dreary old age. Yet, if she let everything else go, and kept the Ranch, she knew that it could not provide for all of them—for Jenny and Arthur, with their extravagant tastes, for Ian and his experiments, for Trevor Holland. It seemed as if the only things one could count on were wars and depressions. If another war broke out, they could manage—if a depression came they would lose everything. She remembered the days in the last depression when a turkey sold for as much as a prime beef. If she had cash in the bank from the sale of the Ranch, and bad times came again, they could all live in luxury. Depressions were kind to people with money in the bank.

She rose and called to George. "We'll start now," she said.

"It is nearly four. I'd like to drive home through Turner Valley and pick up some eggs at your cousin's."

Wong came out with her hat and furs. "You wait for Mr. Holland, no?"

"No, Wong. I must be home by six. But tell him that I want to see him in a day or two. I shall telephone tomorrow and see that you answer the phone. It is important."

The car plunged through the ford, and began the long climb up the coulée. As they sped on towards the Valley, dusk was already falling. The great dome of the Alberta sky, steeper than the vast curve of the limitless land, was opalescent, and far in the distance the melancholy cry of a coyote was heard.

"Creepy, isn't it?" George said with a shiver, looking down at the small figure of his mistress and wondering how she would ever manage without him. "I never can get used to it."

"I love it, George. It is so perfectly attuned to the prairie at evening. This land is in my Indian blood which seems to be getting stronger as I get older."

A slender crescent of moon rose, holding fair weather. Through gate after gate of the Ranch the car sped. The cattle stopped grazing as they passed and stared in immobility. Hungarian partridge out on the road for their evening dusting, whirred back to the fields on rigid wings. As the sun dipped beyond the blue-black mountains, the great gas flares blazed in the dusk, candles on the altar of a new and mighty God.

The car passed over a bridge, and following a road around the base of a hill, came full upon the flaring Valley. The tender moon shone wanly on frosted pipes and silvery storage tanks. Cattle lay heavy and black on the flame-lit hills, and contemplated the roaring inferno as they chewed their cuds. George stopped the car, and they sat gazing at the Valley spread out before them.

"God, isn't it great!" the man said reverently, as he started the car again.

"Great—yes, I suppose it is," answered the woman disconsolately, "It's supposed to mark progress. I am not a

doddering ancient, yet I have lived through a war in which gas engines were not used. I've never felt as old as I do today. The whole world has rolled right past me into a new circle of time."

George turned and looked at Lady MacKenzie in amazement. "A war without gas! Why, it is like talking about bows and arrows. Well, let us hope this gas won't be needed for a war."

"A man is an optimist who hopes that. You can pretty well count on the world muddling into another. Our species seems determined to annihilate itself."

"But nobody wants war," expostulated George. "I'll bet not even the Russians, if you asked them."

"You mean the nobodies don't want war," corrected Lady MacKenzie. "Of course they don't. They have to do the sacrificing, the starving, the fighting, and suffering and dying. But I have yet to see that fact stop a war."

They drew up before a small shack on the outskirts of the village. George went in to get the eggs from his cousin. A gas flare was roaring, not far from the place and Lady MacKenzie remembered how, on a former call, she had felt the house shaking with its force. A stout woman in a flowered print dress came out into the dusk, with a dish in her hand, and going over to a flame in the ground, threw wet potato peelings on it which shrivelled and disappeared. With a cumbersome walk, she came over to the car.

"Good evening, Lady MacKenzie," she cried above the roar of the flare. "George will be out in a minute. I gave you six dozen—all I had."

"Thank you, Rilla. How are Pete and the children?"

"Oh, they are all fine. Pete's gone over to the Double Circle. They're spudding in today and he's got a job with the outfit. A good thing, too. He thought he'd have to go up to the Redwater field. Things are getting quiet in the Valley. You'd better sell your place like Tom Lacey did, or it will be too late." She grinned. "They say the big American oil companies are going up to the new fields in

droves. It cost one company over twenty million dollars to find the Leduc field, but I guess it was worth it."

"Rilla," she cried. "Is Jack Steele in on the Double Circle deal?"

"Heavens, no—that's one of the big companies. Pete says that Jack Steele over-reached himself last year, and is nearly broke," she laughed shrilly. "Lord, will it burn him up if he can't get in on the new fields. No, Tom Lacey got hard cash, Pete says. That's not the way Steele operates. That man can make more money out of nothing than any one I ever heard of. He'll come back, you'll see. He's smart."

Yes, he was smart, Margot MacKenzie admitted to herself. He would pay her for her land in shares. He would call the company MacKenzie Consolidated as he had suggested, using her husband's name to give the public a sense of confidence. He would manipulate the stock and pull out with enough money to form a company and get into the new field. Hundreds of small investors, deprived of their oil gambling by the legitimate practices of large oil companies would buy these shares and lose money, they could ill afford to lose. And if she did not fall in with his plans, she would lose all her property but the Ranch for taxes—he would see to that—and her debts would still be unpaid.

George came out of the house, carrying the eggs, and climbing into the car, they pulled away from the shack. The long twilight was over, and the flares illuminated land and sky. The moon climbed rapidly. The tall bleached grasses by the road side, lit by the car's lights, shivered and rustled in the wind. The loneliness of all the world lay brooding over the dark prairie, lay in the heart of the small dark woman in the car.

Chapter Four

CONSTANCE HOWARD sat at the desk in her room at the Palliser Hotel and clipped together the few notes for Sir Brooke Denton's lecture. The lettering was getting larger all the time. What silly little vanities the man was beginning to indulge in, such as refusing to wear glasses in public! That, she supposed, was the result of being for years the most handsome statesman in England.

She leaned back in her chair and gazed out of the window. Irridescent pigeons were bubbling about on a tiled roof across the way. Below her spread the city, threaded by the river, red in the lurid sunset, and hemmed in by golden hills and escarpments. The mountains were piled heavy and purple against a wild sunset sky across which crimson clouds were torn to shreds by the wind.

What had happened to her since she had left England? "Well," she shrugged, rising and straightening the papers on her desk. "Why ask myself so dramatically what has happened to me?" She knew well enough what had happened. She no longer loved Sir Brooke Denton, and she hated to admit the fact to herself, for it made the past twelve years of her life meaningless.

What a young idealist and romantic she had been at twenty when she had first met Brooke! An uncle had asked Gwen, her wealthy second cousin to find work for her, when she had come from her father's rectory in Sussex with training in secretarial work, and very little money. How well she

remembered with what trepidation she had gone, in answer to Gwen's summons, to the great house in Mayfair. Sitting on the edge of a large leather chair in the library to which she had been shown, she had gazed around the beautiful book-lined room, amazed at the signs of wealth around her. She had always known that this branch of the family was important, but had not realized how rich they were. Properly impressed, she feared that since this cousin Gwen had bothered about her at all, she would have to take whatever work she was offered. Indeed, whether she wanted to or not, she would have to take anything. She had spent a lonely two weeks in London, harassed by rapidly diminishing funds, waiting for just the right position to turn up, but had had no luck.

Her thought had been interrupted by the sound of quick footsteps in the great hall. The door opened, and Gwen entered, followed by her placid, round-faced secretary. As Constance rose, she saw coming briskly towards her a short, slight woman, dressed in sensible tweeds. Her dark hair was shingled, she had a bony horse-like face, but when she removed her glasses and let them dangle between thumb and forefinger, from a wide, black ribbon, Constance saw, with surprise, that her large dark eyes were beautiful and very kind. She had not expected this, and all through the years Gwen's unfailing kindness and understanding had been a thorn in her flesh.

Her uncle had said, "My dear, of course you will get something. I shall speak to Gwen. She is on dozens of boards—a born organizer. If anyone can wangle a job for you, Gwen is the one."

"But, Uncle Hilary, I don't want to be a secretary of a girl's club, or anything like that," Constance had cried in alarm. "I'd like a post where something is going on—something interesting."

Her uncle had laughed. "My dear—with your looks and figure, it will not much matter what you take. You will be married in two years, I wager. Moreover, I'm warning you that you'll take what Gwen suggests. She's like that. She is

so sure that people will do as she wants that they invariably do."

Gwen greeted Constance cordially, sitting facing her, while her secretary sat at the great mahogany desk, poised for note-taking.

"So you are Constance. So nice to meet you. Pretty—indeed quite lovely, isn't she, Miss Kirkland? We must get something very good for you. I knew your father quite well when we were children. My eldest brother went to school with him. Hilary was nearer my age—Suffolk, isn't it?"

"Sussex," answered Constance.

"Oh, yes, of course, Sussex. Miss Kirkland, haven't we a girl's hostel in Sussex?"

Constance's eyes widened in alarm. "Oh, Cousin Gwen. I don't want to leave London."

Gwen turned her kind eyes on her, and looked at the lovely girl through her pincenez. "No? You like London?" she smiled.

Constance nodded her head, feeling foolish and young. "Not yet, Cousin Gwen. It is lonely, and I do miss the country, but I want to be in the midst of things. I am tired of horses, dogs and games."

A sharp laugh of appreciation broke from Gwen as she turned to her secretary.

"Can you think of anything?"

"Not at the moment, unless your husband could use her."

"Of course. The very thing. He will need someone, now that he is going to stand for parliament." She turned and held out her hand. "So glad to have met Eustace's girl," she said brusquely. "Miss Kirkland will give you the address of my husband's office, and I shall telephone him to expect you. I must hurry off to a meeting now. We go down to the country in a day or two, and I shall get in touch with you on my return."

And that had been the beginning of it. That interview had given her a love to which she had dedicated the past twelve years of her life. And now, at thirty-two, she realized that she no longer loved Sir Brooke Denton. The knowledge

had come to her suddenly, as she had watched Sir Brooke speaking at a dinner in Toronto. Even more handsome at fifty-odd than in his youth, she had watched him and listened to him, and suddenly, unbidden, a great anger had risen in her heart against him. It came as a shock to her that he did not believe one word that he was saying so beautifully, and with such ineffable poise—that he never had believed the things he had said. He had sold out—and for what? Position, wealth and all the deference that went with them. He had married her cousin Gwen, ten years older than himself, to achieve this. She had taken him, a man already achieving notice in the Labour party, and made him, and his brains her own. She had planned his career, given him the "right" ideas, seized every advantage that her family's wealth and position in the country could give him. Constance had always blamed Gwen for Brooke's betrayal of himself, although in her heart she knew that this was not fair. Gwen had given to her husband all that she valued most highly herself, never believing for a moment that they were not the right things for him to have.

What Gwen could not give her husband, Constance had supplied in full measure—love, passion and understanding. She was beauty and romance to the man, and her adoration had fed his vanity, stifled by the casual acceptance of his very considerable gifts by his wife's distinguished family. And where had it all led? The Labour Party was in power, to Gwen's consternation and amazement, although she still managed to shrug off the fact as a post-war aberration on the part of her countrymen, which would right itself before too much harm was done. Sir Brooke was keeping himself busy on Conservative committees and speaking tours, where his good looks and impeccable tailoring were an asset to a party choosing to ignore, in the diatribes against Labour, the holocaust of war. As for herself—

"Oh, damn," she murmured softly, as she went and stood in front of the mirror, running a comb through her pale gold hair, powdering her nose. "And where has it brought *me*?" But even the damn was a gentle sigh, shorn of all the vehemence that love, frustration and despair had put into it

before. She leaned forward and looked closely at her face, studying it, no longer as something that gave Brooke joy, but as her own face, behind which she must meet a world without Gwen and Brooke Denton to make the way easy—if she had the courage to break away. It was still lovely—the pale gold hair as shining as ever, the skin as flawless, the large dark blue eyes as clear as a child's. She moved towards the door leading to the sitting room of the suite, hoping Lady Denton had returned and that she would not be alone with Sir Brooke, and grieving that it should be so with her, for she mourned her lost love more than she mourned her lover.

"Well, my Sweet!" Sir Brooke unfolded his long body from the chair in which he had been lounging, his beautiful hands hanging limp over the arms.

"My Sweet." That meant that Gwen had not yet returned. These situations that had once been so thrilling, then so maddeningly frustrating, were now, in the past month merely annoying. As Sir Brooke watched this tall beautiful Englishwoman walk across the room and drop into a chair opposite him, a slight frown appeared between his fine beautifully set dark eyes. What had gone wrong with the whole damn trip? It had not been easy for Constance, travelling with him and his wife, always playing second fiddle to Gwen, although heaven knows, Gwen had been kindness itself, stressing her relationship with her husband's secretary, seeing to it that she was included in all social functions. But the poor darling must have known what it would be like. It was stupid of her to assume this air of indifference towards him. Did she imagine that he was not suffering, too? It was not easy to have her so near and keep a tight rein on his desire.

The whole junket had gone wrong. People were just not interested in what he had to say. In Washington they had listened with sympathy, but knew that he no longer held a position of authority, but on this speaking tour it was obvious that the people had no appreciation of the part he played in the political life of England. All their questions, apprehensive, it is true, were about the Labour Government, or Communism, and he was sick to death of the very word.

This Labour member, Wickford, over in Canada about markets, was packing the lecture halls, just one jump ahead of himself. He was weary with a sense of futility. He should have been in Wickford's place, could have done the job better. A desire to slough all the trappings of his life, for which he had sold his very soul, poured through him. To go away with Constance before they were too old, while life could still give them her rich gifts, to be through with all their little schemings and intrigues, their double talk before others—to think as he wanted, to speak as he believed, to let the world know that this beautiful woman was his—these were the things for which he would now sell his soul.

"Constance," he said, "when this wretched trip is over, when we get home—"

Constance looked up. Brooke leaned forward eagerly, looking into her eyes to see that love and adoration he had so often seen, which he needed now as he had never needed it before. How beautiful she was! What more could a man ask than to live out his life with this woman, gentle, lovely, adoring. "Everything," he mused, "has turned to bitter fruit in the past twelve years, but our enduring love."

Constance looked at him from her dark blue eyes. She had a trick of raising her heavy white lids slowly, so that one savoured their full beauty. The man caught his breath as he saw their blank and weary expression.

"Gwen isn't back yet?"

The man leaned back in his chair and resumed the pose he had had when she entered the room. She *was* different. Surely now—now that he was ready to renounce everything for her, she had not changed towards him! Not Constance, whose love was the one certain and unchanging value in his life. In everything else his timing had been wrong, but surely, not in this!

"No—she hasn't returned. She has gone to some boring tea, given by some ghastly woman's club, poor soul!"

"She'll enjoy it," said Constance, a trifle too tartly. "It is the Women's Conservative Club. Gwen never tires of organizations."

The man's brows shot up as he shrugged his shoulders. Really, the girl *was* on edge. "Lucky for me that she doesn't, but I don't mind telling you that I'm completely fed up with this whole business." He snapped open his cigarette case and offered her a cigarette, his eyes raised to hers as he held out the flaming match, and said slowly,

"Darling, when we get home, if—"

"Brooke, you'll have to get glasses," she broke in hastily, as she drew on her cigarette, and leaned back in the chair.

"Nonsense—don't need them." He shook the match out petulantly, and threw it into an ash tray, then, regretting the sharpness in his voice, he came to her and, putting his hands gently on each side of her face, in a way that she had loved, stooped and kissed her.

"Oh, Brooke!" Tears were in her voice—tears for the emptiness within her, and for the lover whom she no longer loved.

"I know, my sweet. You are having a rotten time, aren't you?"

"I should not have come," Constance said, dabbing at her eyes. "I knew, before we left home, that it would not work. I should have stayed in England and taken my holidays."

"But, darling," protested Brooke, "I could not have done without you. This trip has been no picnic for me, either, I can tell you. All that grind at the Washington Conference, then this dreary speaking jaunt across Canada. Harrison had his hands full at the Conference. As you are aware, I had to leave him there to tidy up the tag ends. It was necessary to have your help for this part of the journey. You are much too beautiful a secretary to bring alone, so if you came, Gwen had to come. And that, my darling, for me, with you so constantly near, had been its own little hell. Come, we shall have a drink."

"It can't be very comfortable for Gwen, either, Brooke. She must know about us."

Immediately the man's manner became cold and reserved. "Can't say about that, my dear. Certainly we have never discussed it." He rose briskly. "Well, let us have that

drink. We shall need it, a dinner before the lecture, you know." He busied himself with the glasses.

"I can't see the necessity of your making this lecture tour at all," said Constance, leaning over and tamping out her cigarette. She was annoyed with herself for speaking thus, but could not stop. She knew that she was saying all the wrong things. How long and well she had studied her part, in order to keep this man's love, and how well she knew her rôle! To be gay because his wife was serious, never to interfere in any way with his career, because his wife made his career her business, to cherish her beauty because his wife was plain.

Sir Brooke handed Constance a glass, and sitting down in the easy chair, he slowly turned his own in his fingers, looking into its amber depths. For a moment he looked utterly weary and dejected, and a sharp stab of pity twisted Constance's heart.

Suddenly he raised his deep-set grey eyes and met hers.

"So you don't know why I am making this lecture tour? Then, apparently, you don't think much of my effort. I must be slipping."

"Oh! Oh!" thought Constance. "Now I have done it." She sipped her drink slowly, then carefully put the glass on the table beside her before answering.

"If you were speaking of the conference at Washington, Brooke, I could see the reason for you taking it on, but you don't even mention the conference, because that would give credit to the Labour Government for arranging it. I know that it makes you cross when I talk like this, but I can't help it. I have been silent too long. I think that you should give up the whole thing, and not bother going into British Columbia at all."

"Nonsense," grinned the man. "British Columbia is going to be the bright spot of the trip. I'm told that half the population is English, circa 1900—my perfect audience. They don't know how things have moved since they left home."

Constance shook her lovely head and smiled. "I don't

know how you can joke about it," she said. "Wickson, the Labour member, has been two weeks ahead of you all the way across Canada, and these small cities cannot support two political lecturers in that space of time."

The man smiled wryly. "You think that Canadians are more interested in what he has to say than in what I have to say. Is that what you are trying to tell me?"

"Yes, Brooke, that is it exactly."

"But, my dear girl," protested Sir Brooke, "I've met men out here, especially in Ontario, who out-Tory any Tory I know in England, who feel more bitterly against our Labour Government than all our upper classes put together. They blame it for every trouble we have, most conveniently forgetting all the mistakes the Conservatives made when they were in power, and which brought these troubles upon us."

"Yes, I know. I have talked to them," Constance admitted. "But this series of lectures you are giving is just another of those 'My God, my King, my Country' series, and I don't think that the average person is interested in that any longer. I know you do it well. There is not another public speaker who can say nothing as beautifully as you can. But, Brooke, that is not good enough for *you*. It is not in tune with the times, and your heart is not in it."

"Aren't you a little late in saying all this, Constance?" Sir Brooke asked gently, and again that feeling of pity filled the girl's heart. "You don't believe, seriously, that I could go back to my early convictions now. Perhaps I have paid too much for my whistle, but for years I have enjoyed piping on it. It would look very shabby to leave my party and join with Labour again, now that they are in the saddle. I stay with my party or I get out of politics, one or the other. Oh, I know that it is hard for you to believe what I am going to say, my girl. For years I have marvelled that you could love me, and yet disapprove of me so wholeheartedly, but I assure you that I have not been a traitor to my better self entirely. It is hard to explain, but I have not been as interested in ideas as I have been in the clever manipulation of ideas, and you must admit that I have made a good job of *that*. Quite

sincerely I assure you that all these years in which you have been grieving because I sold my birthright for a mess of pottage, I have not been struggling with a guilty conscience —I have been enjoying myself immensely. But now—" The man sat, his dark, handsome face sad, as he looked into his glass.

"And now—?" Constance leaned forward, holding her breath, her deep blue eyes fixed on her lover. "Dear God, let him not be unhappy now"—not now when she no longer loved him.

Sir Brooke paused to open his cigarette case before he spoke. There was a new sternness in his face—a new strength to his mouth.

"Now it is all different. There is something about Canada and the United States which fills my heart with love and pity for the common man in my own unhappy country with its many problems. The upper classes in England have had their innings. Their land was a paradise for them. True, I think that they have been less selfish than their class in other lands; at any rate, they have known the value of compromise for their own wellbeing—but what of millions of others who have given everything for their country and have received so pitifully little in return? Constance, during the war the reports I read of the courage, the sacrifice—" The man threw himself back in his chair and stretched out his long legs. "I wax eloquent," he grinned.

Constance's eyes were shining. "Don't laugh it off, Brooke, you are on your course again."

"What do you mean, 'I'm on the course again?' " asked Brooke curiously.

A little frown settled on the girl's smooth brow. "I can't remember exactly. I read about it years ago in some book on Russia. In a northern port they had electrical equipment and when ships were navigating those dangerous waters they could hear the pulsing of the great engine as long as they were in the right channel. Once they got off their course, they could no longer hear it, and had to manœuvre about until they did. You have not been hearing the dynamo,

Brooke, and its pulsing is the very heart beat of the common people. You heard it, clearly enough once, although you fool yourself now that you did not. And now you hear it again. That is what I mean when I say that you are back on your course."

Sir Brooke tapped a cigarette on the back of his hand and lit it. His face in the light of the cupped match was like the face on a Roman coin. "And where, my very dear, is the course going to take me? Will you come along?"

So there it was. Those words, which for twelve years of joy and grief and storm of tears she had longed to hear, had been spoken at last, and she shrank from them.

"Have you plans?" she temporized.

He looked at her, smiling, a slight bewilderment in his eyes. "I haven't progressed as far as plans. All I know is that I can no longer play at politics. Sometimes I think that the chief needs of the world today are truth, integrity and birth control. Having no children, I shall now concentrate on truth and integrity."

"And you say that your conscience has not been bothering you all these years?"

"Do you think it has?" asked the man, leaning towards her. "Then why have you never spoken of this before? Surely, my dear, we have been close enough for that."

Constance shook her head. "It would have been useless, Brooke. You knew exactly what you were doing. You met Gwen when you were a brilliant young socialist, in those days just another voice crying in the wilderness. Gwen belonged to a great political family. Her people had influence. They recognized your gifts, and took them for the use of the Conservative Party. And you have served them faithfully."

"You make it sound dreadful," laughed the man. "But surely you will grant that I have been of some use to my country. The Conservatives have served England, you know, even though not always in accordance with your views. I still don't understand why you never told me of all these thoughts you were harbouring. Next to Gwen, you of all people I know have given me the most help on my way."

Constance shook her head helplessly. "I guess I loved you too much, even to admit them to myself."

The man sat up slowly, drawing in his long legs and leaned towards her. His eyes held hers with a long, level look.

"But you tell me now," he said slowly.

Constance caught her breath, then with relief heard quick sharp footsteps coming down the hill. Hastily Sir Brooke turned on the lamp at his elbow, aware for the first time of the darkening room. Lady Denton entered. She was a short, slight woman, dressed with that distinction of complete dowdiness only achieved by some women of the upper classes in England. Her husband rose quickly and moved over to help her with her furs.

"So here you are!" she said brightly. "We shall have to hurry—an early dinner."

"Did you enjoy your tea party?" asked her husband, pouring a drink for her.

"Very much. They have such quantities of food over here. I simply cannot resist the little cakes. What organization was this, Constance? I could not remember, and most maddeningly, no one mentioned the name of it."

Constance laughed. "Poor souls, it would break their hearts if they heard you say that. It was the Women's Conservative Club."

Lady Denton smiled as she settled in her chair. "Ah, yes, quite so. And very kind and enthusiastic they were, too. Thank you, my dear." She took the drink from her husband.

"They are looking forward with great eagerness to hearing you this evening, Brooke. Apparently they are all attending. Rather dreadful voices they have." She settled back to enjoy her Scotch.

"We'll need them," said Sir Brooke grimly. "Wickson spoke here two weeks ago to a packed house."

Lady Denton dismissed Wickson with a wave of her hand. "That dreadful man! Really, Brooke, you are quite ridiculous to give him a thought. Well," she finished her drink and rose. "We must dress, I suppose. I am quite looking forward to this dinner. Our hostess, so I am told, is a real old-timer, an

expression in Alberta that carries its own distinction, whether one is rich or poor. Lady MacKenzie's father owned great ranches, and saw the country grow from Indians and buffaloes to Mounted police and railways—her husband who died several years ago, was also an old timer, as well as a cabinet minister in the Dominion Government. Lady MacKenzie is a direct descendant of a great Indian chief."

Constance and Brooke broke into laughter. "Gwen, you are priceless," cried Brooke. "Here I have been dreading this dinner all day, as I am sure Constance has, picturing a dull old woman, nobly doing her duty by giving a dull dinner in dull company, and you come along with your story of an Indian Princess, ranches, Mounted Police and buffaloes. My dear," he looked at his wife, "do you never get bored?"

Lady Denton looked up in surprise. "Bored? But how could I be bored? There is so much happening all the time. There are so many things to be done."

Her tall handsome husband looked down at her with one of his rare and gentle glances, and her face glowed.

"And do you never get discouraged with all this doing good which keeps you so busy?" he asked.

"Ah, discouraged—that is something else again. I think that life is a very discouraging business. But then." She smiled. "Perhaps that is why it is not boring. Well, come along, we must hurry."

Lady MacKenzie looked about the large living room. So silly of the children to call it a living room, she thought. The drawing room, the old name for it, was obviously the correct one. Of course, the room was ugly, much too red, and plushy and Victorian, but she liked it, and Janet, having heard her friends rave about her "antiques"—"my dear, a chair just like that at Lawson's—you have no idea of the price"—was beginning to have greater respect for it. She would be glad when the evening was over, and hoped that the dinner would go well, without effort on her part. She sipped her cocktail and measured the degree of sociability.

Things seemed to be satisfactory. The Bishop and Sir

Brooke Denton were by the fireplace, having a wonderful time. The latter was laughing at the Bishop's stories, who, warming to an appreciative audience, was putting on a good show, his twinkling eyes mocking the white beard. Arthur, of course, had made a beeline for the beautiful secretary, Miss Howard. Lovely, she was, a perfect type of English beauty. Jack Steele, hot and red-faced in his stiff shirt, was relating the recent events at the Ranch to Janet, and inwardly raging because that old fool of a Bishop was boring the guest of honour with his stories of the old days, and giving a stranger a totally false impression of what Alberta really was with its enormous coal deposits, its uranium, its wheat, its oil and natural gas—all its vast wealth. Why, in twenty years this Province would be the greatest, the richest—. A man who wanted to invest his money could not do better than—.

Suddenly aware that she was neglecting Lady Denton, seated on the couch beside her, Lady MacKenzie turned to her guest with her warm beautiful smile—that flashing smile, her greatest beauty, that lit up her sad dark face like sunshine rippling over a field of ripe wheat.

"You are tired, Lady Denton. I know from experience how fatiguing these trips can be. We shall just sit and rest and not bother making conversation."

Lady Denton turned her kind eyes on her hostess. "Lady MacKenzie," she laughed. "That is the most charming speech I have heard since I left home. But now that I know I do not have to talk, I am suddenly alive again. Your understanding makes me feel that I have found a friend, and I must try to consolidate that friendship." Their eyes met in a long look, then suddenly both laughed delightedly.

"Our lines have fallen in such different places," Lady MacKenzie said, "And yet, I imagine that in many ways they have been similar—despite our origins. That makes for understanding."

"Someday I should like to hear about those origins of which you speak," murmured Lady Denton. "You would not mind talking about it to me? You speak of our lives having been somewhat similar, but to me yours seems so romantic. I

should have been out here in the early days. I was a restless and energetic soul, and my country and generation did not give me enough scope, so I expended my energies on the material at hand. Now, I am beginning to wonder if I have not done more harm than good to the material."

"You have no children? They provide scope for a short time."

"No, I have no children. You have. You are fortunate. Your daughter is very beautiful, Lady MacKenzie. She is a unique type, and I think one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen."

Margot MacKenzie looked at her daughter. "Yes, she is beautiful. That is one thing she owes to those beginnings of mine, of which we were speaking. That is why her type seems so unique to you."

They watched Janet across the room. The girl was standing by a tall chair, her long hand resting on the back, her lovely figure draped in a soft green frock, which revealed every line of her beautiful body. Her long green eyes, the same colour as her dress, were turned sideways towards Sir Brooke. He had turned from the Bishop as he drained his glass, and he had seen her watching him. He paused, glass upraised, then slowly placed it on the table beside him. "I didn't notice her before, I didn't realize" he thought, shaken, as all men are by beauty. "God, she's lovely—an Indian Princess!" They smiled slowly at one another.

The two older women on the sofa watched the little drama, then turned, to each other, chuckling.

"Perfect of their kind, aren't they—each one," said Margot MacKenzie softly.

"Yes," nodded Gwen eagerly, "that is why the situation is not dangerous. Beauty such as they have must have votaries."

"She's years older than her husband, and she loves him, but he does not love her," thought Lady MacKenzie. "She should have had a son." And with that thought came the longing for Napier. Grief flowed through her, wiping out her momentary pleasure in her new friend, the lights and voices in the room pressed against her and the old feeling of

panic threatened. With a deep sigh of relief she heard dinner announced.

Margot MacKenzie gazed around the dinner table. The little party was a success. The cocktails had been just right. That meant that Annie had mixed them, over the protests of Arthur and the hired butler. She was glad that she had gone into the fast-diminishing stock of good wine. This was a night of celebration, for friends were not easily come by when one was old. Everyone was in good form. The lovely English girl discussed painting with Arthur. She had talked with Picasso, met Matisse. The Bishop was amusing—not boring as he sometimes was, and Lady Denton was enjoying him. The charm of Sir Brooke made Janet glow, and seem witty and clever. Her mother sighed and hoped that she was keeping her feet and knees to herself. Only Jack Steele was out of his element, confounded by the lack of interest in the coming elections, the fortunes to be made in oil, the threat of Communism. "Now," thought Lady MacKenzie, "surely Janet can see how crude the man is."

But Jack Steele was consoling himself. Soon, as President of the Service Club, he would be introducing the speaker of the evening. He would be among his own kind, and his little jokes would be appreciated. He must remember to bring in, in some way, a reference to the football club, which had won the cup. There would be a fine crowd. The boys had seen to that. If only he could be sure of Sir Brooke. What was he talking to Janet and Arthur about now? Donne and Hopkins! Who the hell were they?

Lady MacKenzie hated to break up the gathering. Reluctantly they rose, gathered their wraps and stood about the hall. Jack Steele took charge of Sir Brooke.

"You and I shall drive down in my car, ahead of the others," he said. "I am to introduce you, and I'd like to get a few notes."

"Yes, of course, very good of you."

A sinking sensation caught at Margot MacKenzie. This could not be the end. "I have a feeling," she said to herself, and smiled, thinking of the old family joke—"Mother has a

feeling." But she *did* have feelings. These people must not go out of her life like this if she could prevent it.

She turned to Constance. Sir Brooke was putting on her evening cloak, and those dark hooded eyes, set in their smudged pockets, did not miss the look in his eyes as his hands pressed for a moment on the girl's shoulders.

"So that is it," she sighed to herself. "I wonder if she is in love with him." She pondered on how a man of Sir Brooke's wide experience could so let his guard down. More than once during dinner, watching his handsome face, she had seen this happen, and was sure that it had seldom occurred before. "He seems to be going through some crisis," she mused. "I only hope it will not hurt his wife more than she has been hurt already."

"I suppose that you leave Calgary tomorrow," she said. "I should like to take you out to our Ranch for a few days. It would be a bit of the old West—as much of it as still exists."

Constance and Sir Brooke's faces lit up. "Gwen," he called, "come and hear this. Lady MacKenzie has asked us to spend a few days at her Ranch. You would enjoy that, wouldn't you?" He turned and smiled at his hostess. "My wife is incurably romantic about cowboys and Indians—a hangover, I imagine, from her early reading."

"Oh, Brooke!" beamed Gwen. "Could we go? What about Banff? We had arranged to rest there for several days." She explained to Margot. "Can we cancel our arrangement, Brooke?"

"Of course we can. Indeed we must. This is a rare treat offered us."

Jack Steele joined the group. "Lady MacKenzie's ranch is near Turner Valley, one of our oil fields. You could drive over and see it. I'd be glad to have a friend of mine out there show you about. And now I think we had better be on our way, or we shall be late."

Lady Denton and Lady MacKenzie led the way to the cars. "This is very kind of you," said Gwen. "Banff we have seen

before, but a western ranch—that will indeed be a new experience."

"I hope you won't be disappointed. Nothing at the Ranch is carried on, on the old scale. Your husband will have some shooting. We shall drive you down tomorrow. I love the Ranch, and have sometimes seriously considered moving out there permanently, but so many things keep interfering with those plans." She sighed softly, and felt the warm pressure of Gwen Denton's hand on her arm.

"I know," she sympathized. "It is the everlasting interference of petty things that complicates our lives. If we could only keep to a straight path, but we are always dashing off in all directions, like Leacock's horse, and getting no place. The young people scoff at us for it. They see their way so clearly, but before they know it, they are all muddled up, and dashing about, too."

The car pulled up in front of the opera house. Arthur, Constance and the two older women got out, and George drove the car away. It had amused Margot MacKenzie to have Janet follow in the small car with the Bishop.

"We go in the side door," said Arthur importantly, and led the way with Constance. "Poor Arthur," thought his mother. "He is quite bowled over by such charm and beauty. Tomorrow he will be restless and want to go to Paris to paint one-eyed women, or twist wire into strange little men."

She turned to look for Lady Denton, and saw her standing at the entrance to the alleyway, gazing up at the sky, and she joined her.

"It is lovely, isn't it?"

"My dear, it makes me breathless. A dark blue sky at night—so marvellously arched. And the stars are not like the stars at home; set in the sky. They are so plainly seen as worlds of light, floating in vast, dark space."

"I'm glad that you like our sky, for it is Alberta's greatest beauty, as lovely in the day as at night. I think that our clear

dry air does it—little humidity to fade out the glorious colour."

As they entered their box and settled down, Lady MacKenzie asked pityingly, "How many times have you heard this talk?"

Lady Denton rolled her eyes. "I have lost count. I think of something else and then tell Brooke how wonderful he was. Tonight I'm going to have a splendid time. I shall think of the sky and of the Ranch."

Chapter Five

WHEN Lady MacKenzie went to her room after the lecture, Annie was busy making things ready for her mistress.

"Annie, you should not have stayed up. What a treasure you are! I am bone weary. The lecture was tiresome. Sir Brooke looked so handsome, so at ease on the platform, and spoke so beautifully, but he said nothing at all. However, his audience was well pleased. That is the trouble with these public speakers—they are always talking to people who hold similar convictions. But it has been a good day."

"You like these English people?" asked Annie, plumping up the pillows.

"Yes, very much, particularly Lady Denton. Queer, Annie—she is unhappy and troubled, yet I could say nothing to comfort her. I know that much of her worry will soon be over and I long to tell her so. The lovely secretary no longer loves Sir Brooke. All this heartache and trouble about something. Then some morning, the girl no longer loves the handsome Sir Brooke and does not know why."

Slowly Margot MacKenzie took the pins from her hair and began to brush it. "There is only one sorrow—one grief—" She closed her eyes for a moment and saw Napier smiling down at her, and love and longing poured through her.

"I know, I know," murmured Annie. "Come, I'll help you into bed. Do you want anything? I can get it in a minute."

"Not tonight, Annie. I'll sleep like a top. By the way, these people are coming out to the Ranch for a few days. I must get up early and make arrangements."

"Land's sake, Lady MacKenzie," cried Annie in annoyance. "Why do you want to go doing that! Is this some of Miss Janet's nonsense?"

Her mistress laughed as she rubbed cream on her face. "No, Annie, this is my nonsense. It may be our last house party at the Bar X."

"Not if you move out there," said the maid crossly. "You can just go so long, then you have to break out into a party."

"And you think that I am too old for it. Well—perhaps you are right."

"Well, that's as may be, but I must admit that you don't *look* too old for it." She came and peered in the glass before which her mistress sat, looking over her shoulder. "It's a caution—not a grey hair—hardly a wrinkle."

"That's because my skin is like leather, and my cheekbones hold it up. You and George will have to take the small car and go to the Ranch first thing in the morning, to take out supplies. I'll make out a list as soon as I get into bed. We shall be out for tea. And now, off to bed with you. You and George must be down town as soon as the stores are open. I'll have my tray at eight. And Annie, will you speak to Mr. Ian yourself? Tell him that he must join the party. I need him."

"Mr. Ian won't like that, Lady MacKenzie, and I don't blame him. That boy is doing a real job, and he shouldn't have to waste his time at parties. How can he get going on all those ideas for the Ranch that he picked up at college if he has to give up whole days to playing. He lost six years in the war."

Margot MacKenzie, sitting up in bed, busy with her list, looked up and smiled.

"You and your Mr. Ian. You love him very much, don't you, Annie, almost as much as I do."

"I love him just as much, Lady MacKenzie, because I loved him and Napier as much as one person can love another."

The little wizened woman spoke with solemn dignity, her dark face, wrinkled as a raisin, taking on beauty.

"I know, my dear," her mistress said gently. "And you think that I do not consider Ian enough, that I am not interested in his plans, because I am so filled with grief for his brother who did not come back. No, Annie, that is not so. Without Ian I would not live a day, but I am numb and empty, and so infinitely weary of life that it is hard to make the effort of even showing love. Good night, Annie."

The door closed softly, and Lady MacKenzie sat up in bed, looking through the wide windows at the bare trees in the garden tossing black branches against a clear, starry sky. Dear Ian—trying to find a way of life for himself after a war that he had hated, a war in which he had fought, and suffered the loss of the person dearest to him. He must have missed Napier even more than she had, for Napier and Annie had been his only confidants, yet because he had never talked of Napier to her since his homecoming, as she had longed for him to do, she had not realized what the depth of his sorrow must have been.

How could she, for a moment, have thought of selling the Ranch, which the twins had loved. For Napier, it had been a haven of pleasure, but to Ian it was his career—his whole life. His studies at the University, his hopes since his return, were centred in it. Her thoughts began going around in the same old circle. If she did not sell it—what of Janet and Arthur, where could she find money for taxes, wages—for food itself? The Ranch had not paid its way for years, although Ian was convinced that he could make it do so, had he the needed capital. Then the endless "figuring," as she called it, began. She could not afford even this house party—small as it would be. Trevor would remind her again that the Ranch was no longer an expensive toy, as it was in her husband's time, that the boys on the place were there to work —not to put on wild west shows.

She leaned over and put out the light, praying that she would sleep, determined not to take a drink. Perhaps she

would dream of the twins when they were small as she sometimes did—dream that they were at the Ranch.

The stars and northern lights shone, steeping the room and garden in light, and caught the smile on the dark face against the pillow—of a woman in a dream where two small boys raced across the prairies on their ponies.

When Annie came in with her mistress' breakfast tray, Lady MacKenzie was already sitting up in bed, talking on the telephone to Trevor Holland at the Ranch.

"Trevor, please, stop grousing and help me. There will be Sir Brooke and Lady Denton—Miss Howard, a cousin of Lady Denton, Arthur and Janet—Jack Steele.

"What's that? Well, I couldn't help it. He practically asked himself. He is to take us on a personally conducted tour of the oil fields at Turner Valley. Sir Brooke seemed interested. Put him in one of the bunk houses, if you like, then we won't be tripping over him in the house all the time. Also, and this is important to me—I want you and Ian to stay with the party. It may be our last at the Ranch and you must be there.

"What's that? No, no, you don't need to get out your dress clothes, and don't sound so grumpy. We won't dress for dinner. I want everything to be as old-time Western as possible, but that doesn't mean you're to appear in a pink silk shirt. Tell Wong to get out the old ranch table with the Lazy Susan—it's in one of the sheds. Have some cranky horses in some of the corrals. Tell the boys I want them to dress up like Christmas trees." She chuckled.

"Ah, that's the spirit, my dear. Stampede outfits, spurs, ten-gallon hats—their fanciest boots and chaps. I want them to herd some cattle on that hill across the river, and do some rope throwing, but for goodness' sake tell them not to look as if they were putting on a show. George can make Smoky do a bit of bucking. Oh, Trevor, it will be fun. The boys can have a bit of a holiday tomorrow and be all over the place. A bonfire at night by the river—and songs, with Andre's mandolin.

"What's that?" A sharp frown appeared between the

woman's brows. "Oh, I know it will cost something, but honestly, Trevor, I have a feeling that it will be worth it. It may be our last fling, and it must be a good one.

"This is Wednesday—shooting early Thursday morning, oil fields in afternoon—Friday nothing special arranged, and we'll break up Friday evening or Saturday. By the way, will you telephone Tom and Mary Lacey to come for dinner? Annie and George will be out by eleven. Annie will look after the rooms, George the drinks and fires—and tell Annie not to fuss. I want things to be very simple. Tell Wong that I want no fancy food—just plain Ranch meals. Have you been shooting? Splendid! We'll have cold birds for lunch on Thursday.

"And, Trevor, do have the place warm. It gets very cold these fall nights in the high altitude. See that the gas in the furnace is lit, and fires in the fireplaces. Give my love to Ian. I didn't hear you. Over three minutes? Oh, Trevor, the devil with three minutes. You are becoming a miser. You and Ian will meet us all at four-thirty in the Big Room for tea, won't you? It will spoil everything for me if you don't. Annie and I shall be staying on for a few days after the others leave and—" She turned to Annie, annoyance on her face. "He rang off," she said ruefully.

"And so he should," Annie cried tartly. "The telephone bills in this house are shocking!" Then she smiled as she picked up a long list from the bedside table. "Right in your element again, aren't you—organizing a party? I'll have to hurry if we're to buy all this. You'll have enough food to feed a regiment." She bustled from the room pleased that her mistress was interested in something at last. Mr. Trevor would be cross, but it was money well spent.

The party was blessed with glorious weather on the drive out to the Ranch. The sun shone down on a golden land of grain and stubble. Combines were working in the fields, and great mounds of wheat lay here and there, with trucks drawn up beside them to take it to the tall elevators that towered in the distance. The raucous cry of a pheasant could be heard now and then, or a cock would strut across the road in

all the glory of its autumnal colouring, and Hungarian partridge were seen, floating from field to field as they were disturbed by the harvesters.

Little was said. Janet, annoyed because she had to drive the big car, and so could not drive with Jack Steele and Constance in his long, low-swung convertible, which had passed them on the outskirts of the city, with a derisive blowing of its horn, annoyed moreover, because Lady Denton was put in the front seat in order to have a better view of the country, thus depriving the girl of Sir Brooke's company—God, he was a handsome devil—cross because her mother would not sell this old car and get a new one like Jack's—was silent, thinking of the row that she was going to have with Ian.

She would be able, with Arthur's help, to handle her mother, but it was going to be a battle royal with Ian. She had quarrelled with the twins all her life, jealous of her mother's special love for them, convinced that everything she had been denied had been because Napier and Ian had received too much. And now she feared that her mother might refuse to sell the Ranch because of Ian's idiotic notion that he wanted to be a farmer. Jack had been encouraged yesterday, when he had talked to her mother, but he didn't know Trevor and Ian, and their love for the place. Her hand slapped down hard on the steering wheel. She would not have them spoiling her plans.

Gwen Denton turned and smiled warmly at the girl. How lovely she was. Knowing her heritage, she could trace its flowering into this beauty. In Europe it would have been a puzzling type. "I'm half-drugged with this clear air, laden with the smell of ripe wheat," she said. "It is wonderful to drive like this, gazing for miles into the distance, with nothing to obstruct one's vision. I swear that I can see the curve of the earth."

Sir Brooke laughed, leaning forward in the back seat. "Now, my dear, don't tell me that on land, in a car, you can see that!"

"But I can, Brooke. Haven't you noticed it? One can gaze so far into the distance in the clear air."

"It's the sky that amazes me. It seems so vast and high, like a clear cerulean blue bowl turned over a golden plate. Imagine a rainbow across a sweep of sky like that!"

"I have seen three rainbows across the sky at the same time," said Lady MacKenzie.

"I remember that, Mother," broke in Janet eagerly and unexpectedly. "You showed us how they were standing in a great pot of gold—three huge and perfect rainbows. We were driving out to the Ranch after a small cloudburst in Calgary. There had been hailstones bigger than walnuts. I had to go back to school in a few days and was frantic lest the storm prevent us from getting out to the country. Then the sun came out and we started. Everything was glistening like fairyland. We *did* have fun in those days, didn't we?"

"They were the happiest days of my life, dear. I think that they were the happiest days of all our lives. If only one knew as he goes through life when he is having those days, so that one could savour every moment of them and not clutter them up with petty little worries about things which are of no consequence."

"And yet," thought Janet, "I wasn't happy. I had everything to make me so, but I was always wanting something more than I had." That, she realized dimly, had always been her trouble—forever wanting. Her restless wanting had wearied two husbands. Well, she wanted only one more thing—her share of the money when this oil deal went through. Jack would sell her shares for her at a good profit; she was confident of that. Then she would go away—to France again, perhaps. She must get away from the infinite boredom of her life—and from Jack Steele. Why had she gone back to his house after the party the other night? She had been a fool. She shivered, troubled by the fact that a man whom she did not even like could have such a strong physical attraction for her. If that silly little bitch of a wife of his holidaying in Eastern Canada ever heard of it, what a pretty scandal she'd raise. And scandals were no longer

smart; they were definitely pre-war. Her only hope was to marry money; two divorces were enough to live down in a small mid-western city, without having her name linked with Jack Steele's. No, she must go away—and a dozen Ians would not stop her. She had always got what she wanted from her mother if she made enough fuss about it.

They were a tired party as they took the last dip down to the ford in the river, and pulled up at the Ranch house. Trevor Holland was at the gate to meet them, dressed as Lady MacKenzie had hoped, in his good tweed sports jacket and grey slacks, looking the prosperous country gentleman. He had been retiring more and more into himself, staying close to the Ranch, and giving up his old haunts and friends in the city. George and two of the cowboys, dressed to kill, busied themselves with the luggage. Annie clucked about, showing the guests to their rooms, and it seemed as if at every door through which Margot MacKenzie looked she saw the small, emaciated figure of Wong hovering in the background, his face wreathed in smiles because once again the Ranch house would be gay with guests on whom he could mercilessly practice his matchless culinary art.

When the party met for tea in the Big Room, with its great windows looking out on a vast land of rolling hills, to the great semi-circle of the Rockies, the blood-red sun was already slipping down an opalescent sky. The mountains were a blue-black jagged silhouette against the heavens. A fire of poplar logs crackled and snapped in the huge fireplace. Two or three lamps made only a dim light in the room. The guests were silent with the grandeur and wonder of what lay spread before them beyond the window. Margot MacKenzie, sitting by the tea table, waiting for Annie to bring in the tray, speculated about what they were thinking. She could feel Alberta seeping into them.

"Well?" she smiled. "The room is vibrant with your thoughts. Not your usual thoughts."

Gwen Denton turned her erect little figure towards her hostess. "To be frank, it frightens me a bit. I need clipped hedges, mown lawns, a fenced-in feeling, or I am lost."

Annie, entering with the tea tray caused an interruption, and Janet sighed with relief. Really, mother was getting too weird with her vibrating thoughts and such like. In a minute she would have started talking about the land being in her blood, or her "feelings," or some rot about her Indian forebears. She would not have dared talk like that when Janet's father was alive. She turned hastily to Sir Brooke with a question, glad that her tact could save her mother from making a fool of herself before these distinguished people.

Sir Brooke moved over to the chesterfield on which Janet was sitting, giving a light answer to her question. Their eyes measured each other, and he shook his head and laughed. That laugh slowed the quickening of her pulse, the thrumming of her blood. They knew each other, these two. She joined in the laughter.

Lady MacKenzie had been watching the little by-play. Janet simply must behave. To distract Sir Brooke she asked, "And you, Sir Brooke? Do you feel lost in our wide spaces?"

He gazed through the window, slowly stirring his tea. The sun was now beginning to slide behind the mountain peaks, and the whole scene was like a child's picture of paper cut-outs, with its deep red sun showing behind the jagged purple mountain tops. Again Margot MacKenzie saw the mask drop from that face of classic beauty and this time it showed infinite weariness. He turned to his hostess and spoke seriously.

"I feel lost—in futility. The sense of vastness out there makes things one has thought very important seem unimportant. It is not a happy feeling."

There was an uncomfortable pause that Margot sought to fill.

"And you, Miss Howard?"

The girl's eyes were large and luminous. Her lovely face shone in the afterglow that filled the room. "I love it—the whole country," she cried with embarrassing vehemence. "I never want to leave it. I don't want to go home."

"But, my dear Constance," protested Gwen Denton, putting her cup on a nearby table and accepting a light for

her cigarette from Trevor. "That we could not have. Brooke, what dreadful thing have we done, bringing this cousin of mine with us? Imagine home without Constance."

Constance laughed her chuckling laugh, which foretold a stout middle-age unless she treasured her beauty too much to allow it. "Oh, I'll go home, and I shall love the coziness of the English countryside as much as I ever did. I've been bowled over by this vast grandeur, by the brilliant sunshine, the clear air, the altitude. I don't feel quite sane."

"That's right," broke in Trevor with a laugh. "You are learning fast. All our women blame their moods on the altitude."

Constance threw him a grateful smile. She was surprised at and ashamed of her outburst. Arthur came in, demanding tea, and announcing importantly that he had been out painting—he thought he had really got something. Trevor rose and turned on some more lights. The little party shifted about. Jack Steele sought out Janet on the chesterfield. Trevor brought over some cups and put them on the tray.

"Where is Ian, Trevor?" Margot MacKenzie asked anxiously. "I did want him to join us so very much."

"He will, my dear, don't worry," the man assured her. "He will be in for dinner. We are all rallying around you. I told him you had a 'feeling.'" He smiled tenderly down at this woman, who had wrecked his promising career, and whom he had loved for so many empty years.

"Dear Trevor, what would I do without you?" she said softly.

The man leaned over from his great height, his handsome weather-beaten face close to hers. "Do you still like to be told that a man is in love with you, now that you count your age in decades, rather than years?"

She looked up, amazed that her heart had skipped a beat, and met the blaze of love in the man's eyes. "Why, yes, Trevor, I do indeed. But you have not told me that for a long time."

He patted her arm and crossed the room to Sir Brooke, where they stood in front of the fire discussing ranching,

the price of meat in Canada, the wintering of cattle outdoors, Chinook winds that gave to Southern Alberta long spells of warm sunny weather in mid-winter.

The two older women joined each other.

"Your son Ian is here, I think you said last night?" Gwen said.

"Yes, he lives on the Ranch." Margot MacKenzie's eyes shone with pride. "He is Napier's twin brother—the farmer of the family. You will meet him at dinner. He studied agriculture at the University of Alberta, and since he came back from overseas he has great plans of turning part of the Ranch into mixed farming. He is the solid one of the family —as solid as a rock. And now you will want to go to your rooms and rest. We have dinner at eight, and we don't dress. A neighbour and his wife—very old friends, are coming. We shall meet here for cocktails at seven-thirty."

The unexpected smile lit up the small dark face.

"How happy you make me. It is a rare thing to find a friend after one has reached my age."

"Rarer for me than you, I think," said the other. "My appearance so belies my feelings. I think I shall have several cocktails before dinner to celebrate."

They moved towards the door, and the others followed. Jack Steele laid his hand on Janet's arm and they loitered behind.

"Did your mother say anything about our talk yesterday?" he asked when they were alone. "Why the devil didn't you tell me she was coming out here?"

"Because I didn't know," she snapped. "I'm not my mother's keeper. She hasn't said a word about you being here. As a matter of fact, we haven't had a minute alone to talk about anything. For heaven's sake, play up to Trevor. She always insists that people treat him as one of the family. And I'm warning you that if Trevor says she must sell the Ranch, she will, and if he says 'thumbs down,' she won't. You'd be wiser if you gave him some attention, instead of troubling to impress Constance Howard."

"Not jealous?" he grinned.

"No, I'm not!" she answered angrily. "But you are wasting your time there. That's girl's interests are elsewhere."

The man nodded.

"Yes, I saw that set up. Very convenient, this secretary arrangement, but it's not a waste of time, my dear. I've been talking to Sir Brooke and he's interested. It would mean something to have that name on our list of directors. I imagine the girl has a good deal of influence with him."

"Well, as far as the Ranch is concerned it's Trevor who will decide," said Janet.

Jack Steele spoke confidently.

"I'll handle Trevor. It's Ian and his crackpot farming ideas who may wreck things. I wish you would talk to him and find out what he thinks of the idea. Well, I'll get along to my bunk house. I suppose it's dinner jackets?"

"No, mother insists on simplicity and informality. Apparently she had never heard that Englishmen dress for dinner in the jungle. I do wish she would not stick to these notions of hers when important people come out here. Imagine what they must think of us! What's this about a bunk house?"

"Didn't you know?" asked Jack indignantly. "I'm sleeping in one of the empty bunk houses."

"Oh, Jack!" Janet laughed, as the man's face turned red with annoyance. "You are comfortable, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, it's comfortable enough, only—" he shrugged.

"Your dignity is offended. You should be flattered. A former Prime Minister has slept in a bunk house here, and several cabinet ministers, and have thought nothing of it. There are only so many rooms in the Ranch house. You should be surer of yourself, darling, and your dignity would take care of itself."

She was angry. She might be a bit mad about this man, but he, an upstart, could not criticize a MacKenzie.

His hands closed about her delicate wrists and he pulled her slowly to him. Her mouth closed eagerly on his.

"I'll go out later and see that you are comfortable," she whispered breathlessly.

Constance had arrived with Jack Steele almost three-

quarters of an hour before the others. She had enjoyed the drive out, racing along at seventy miles an hour, the wind pressing against them in the open car, the great blue dome of the sky above, the golden land about them. She had not, however, enjoyed Jack Steele's company, and was puzzled as to why he was again present in a group into which he did not seem to fit. She was sure that he must be very rich, for Brooke had said that he was interested in the oil business, as well as being in politics. However, he was a very tiresome man, who always sat too near a woman, always made seemingly accidental contacts, and was incapable of knowing that a woman could be fastidious but not prudish. He had wanted to make an impression on Constance, because he knew that she could influence Sir Brooke. That family, he had heard, was rolling in money, and he might just as well have some of it as the next one. Even if he could not find some way of getting around the exchange restrictions, his name on the directorate would be worth a great deal.

After being shown to a bunk house which had been prepared for him, he changed his clothes, and sauntered out to make his conquest. He waited on the verandah, impatiently sipping a Scotch and soda that George had brought him. Damn it all, where had the girl gone?

"Have you seen Miss Howard about?" he finally asked George, who had come out to raise the awnings.

"No, sir. I don't think that she is in her room. Perhaps she has gone for a walk."

Jack rose and looked about, but could see no sign of her. He walked down to the gate and passed through it, still looking about him.

Constance, whose object had been to avoid him until the other car arrived, had hurried from her room and walked over to a group of farm buildings where she hoped that she would be out of sight of the house. She stood on the far side of a corral, looking through the bars at a group of unbroken colts moving about inside it. They were restless and wild looking, their eyes rolling so that the whites showed. One would suddenly rear up on its hind legs, hooves threshing and

whinny, then, in a second, the whole group would be milling about, the dust rising above them in a thick cloud. She would have been terrified, despite the bars, had it not been for two cowboys sitting on the top rail, their fancy high cowboy boots dangling over the fence, their pink and green silk shirts and wide ten-gallon hats giving an authentic touch of the wild west to the scene. When they saw Constance one of them gave a low whistle, and the other hurriedly kicked at him. Constance looked up and laughed, and both hats came off in a sweeping gesture.

"Hello!" called the girl. "Aren't you afraid these horses will bite your legs off? They look vicious enough to do so."

The men jumped down from the high rail and came swaggering towards her with their bow-legged rolling walk, thumbs in their silver-studded leather belts, their ornate cuffs winking in the sun.

"Horses is our business, Miss; them and cattle." They solemnly shook hands and introduced each other. "This is Clem Dawson, Ma'am, the best roper in these parts."

"And this is Slim Stearns. He won first place in the chuck-wagon races at the Stampede last summer."

"And I'm Constance Howard," smiled Constance. "And I've never done a thing worth talking about. What on earth is a chuckwagon race?"

The two men looked at her in astonishment.

"You don't know what a chuckwagon race is? Lady, you've something to look forward to. It's a chariot race gone really wild."

Squatting on their heels, they described the race to her, drawing diagrams in the dust with their fingers.

"A chuckwagon is really a cookhouse on wheels that we take around the Ranch to feed the men at round-up-time. It has a stove in it, an old canvas awning, etc. Well, in a race we have four horses to draw it, and four out-riders. Four outfits line up in the centre field, their backs to the grandstand. When the horn blows, the out-riders toss in the stove and canvas, jump on their horses—the driver makes a figure eight around some barrels and out the opening to the track, then

it's hell bent for leather around the race track. It's some sight, Miss."

"It must be," Constance gasped. "Sixteen horses, harnessed to four wagons—sixteen out-riders tearing like mad around a race track. That I must see someday. Don't they have dreadful accidents?"

"Some bad spills. No one has been killed. You come over here to live?"

"No," the girl shook her head. "But now that I am here, I'd like to stay."

"Well, why not stay?" asked Clem.

"One can't just say, 'I'll stay here,' and never go back to England."

"Why can't you?" both chorused in genuine perplexity.

Constance looked up and saw Jack Steele loitering about the gate at the house. "Oh!" she exclaimed in annoyance.

Both boys turned around, and following the direction of her gaze, saw the man standing by the gate looking about him. They frowned, their glances meeting.

"What's that twirp doing out here again?" growled Slim. "He was down here yesterday."

"You don't suppose—" questioned Clem, with raised eyebrows, leaving the question in mid-air.

"No! No!" his friend exploded. "The Old Girl wouldn't do that; not with *this* place and not to *him*. And Ian wouldn't stand for it."

"All the same," Clem said, looking troubled, "I don't like it."

Puzzled, Constance looked from one to the other.

"Mr. Steele has come down for several days," she volunteered. "He drove me down, Sir Brooke and Lady Denton, Lady MacKenzie, her son and daughter are following. And who is Ian, who will not allow this and that?" she asked curiously.

"Ian?" cried Clem. "Ian MacKenzie, Lady MacKenzie's son. He lives at the Ranch—has ever since he came back from the war. He and his twin brother, who was killed, are

the pick of the family. And Lady MacKenzie, she's a good sort. But that Jack Steele—" he shrugged expressively.

"I agree," laughed Constance, imitating the shrug, amused at this frank discussion of their employer's guest, before another guest.

"He's looking for you," stated Clem, watching the heavy figure by the gate through pale blue squinting eyes.

"Sure he's looking for you," agreed Slim. "Trust Steele to be on the job when there's a swell-looking skirt around. Want to see him?" He looked at her closely, and as she emphatically shook her head, beamed approval. "Good girl! Slip around the corner of the corral and go into that big cattle barn ahead of you. It's empty and you can walk straight through and go out the far door. There's a path to the river that leads through the scrub to the house."

Constance obeyed instructions. Halfway down the long aisle between the stalls she looked through a side door, through which the sun was pouring, to where a man was forking manure. He stared at her in silent surprise, the fork suspended.

"Oh!" cried Constance, startled, and then gazed as open-eyed and silent as the man. He stood in a golden haze of dust motes. His hair was golden, brushed back in a slight wave from a widow's peak. Beneath his broad brow, his hazel eyes and thick lashes were as golden as his hair. Though not tall, the perfect bone structure of his face and his strong tanned body stripped to the waist, gave an impression of size and strength. The sun glowed about him.

Constance laughed a little breathlessly, suddenly embarrassed by their mutual silence.

"You look so amazing—like a golden statue out there from within the dark barn. No wonder I was speechless."

The man shoved his fork with deliberation into the pile of manure and came slowly towards the girl. His mobile lips were smiling in wonder, showing his white teeth in his tanned face.

"And you, of course, are Ceres, the Goddess I worship," he said softly.

"Really!" thought Constance. "This is all quite mad. Are there never any preliminaries when one meets farm hands here?"

"Slim and Clem told me that if I came through here, I'd find a path back to the house," she explained. "I just arrived a few minutes ago. Lady MacKenzie and the rest of the party will be here anytime now, and I must get back."

"Come along," said the man, "and I'll show you the way. And you shall see my white bull as we go out."

They walked along the dim aisle in silence, then, at the same instant, stole a side glance at each other.

"Caught you!" laughed the man.

"Well, I caught you, too!" cried Constance, annoyed with herself for blushing.

They stopped at a large box stall, and in it was the largest bull the girl had ever seen, country-bred as she was.

"Well, here he is," her companion said with pride. "Isn't he a beauty?"

The animal was pure white, beautifully cared for, its coat soft and shining. When he saw the man he came over to the front of the stall and lowered his head, his mean little eyes softening. The man leaned over and scratched him behind the ears.

"No wonder you're proud of him!" exclaimed Constance softly. "The creature is simply fantastic. Is he dangerous?"

"All bulls are dangerous. That is the first lesson to learn when one has to handle them. But I love him, nevertheless, don't I, old fellow?"

"He likes you, too. I've never seen anything like him, although I was brought up in the country in England. He makes me think of eastern lands—white palaces and potentates."

The man turned and smiled at her in quick appreciation.

"Exactly! I've always thought the same thing. Can't you see him decked out with wreaths of pink flowers?"

They smiled warmly at one another.

"Poor old boy," sighed the man. "He's an anachronism now, like the potentates. We're going in for Herefords. But

he was famous in the whole Province once. So you are one of the English guests they are expecting up at the house. Are you Lady Denton?"

"Oh, no!" Constance shook her head. "I'm Lady Denton's second cousin, but my real rôle is Sir Brooke's secretary."

"That's good!" exclaimed her companion with satisfaction. "I'm glad of that."

"Why?" she asked, a trace of reserve slipping into her voice. "I really can't quite see—" then faltered before the beauty of this man, the charm of his smile, the admiration blazing in his eyes.

"No use, my dear," he grinned. "You hesitated, so just forget your dignity. I'm glad, because if you were Lady Denton you would be married, wouldn't you?"

Ice *did* creep into Constance's voice this time.

"I still can't see what difference it makes," she said coldly. There was a slight pause. The bull, neglected, moved to a far corner of the stall and sulked.

"Sorry," said the man hastily. "We'll get on safer ground. I haven't asked you the stock question yet. How do you like Alberta?"

Constance ran her finger slowly along the railing of the stall, and a little frown puckered her smooth forehead.

"I don't know," she answered, wondering why she did not make the hackneyed reply to the inevitable question. "The person I was in England does not, I am sure, like Alberta. It is blatant, and big, and new, and driving, but the person I am in Alberta loves it. It sounds ridiculous, I know, but I feel as if I should have been born here."

Her companion looked down at her nodding his head in understanding. As he met her deep blue serious eyes, looking faintly bewildered, his heart leaped within him, and he controlled with an effort an insane desire to take her in his arms. "Lord," he thought with panic, "I'm in love with her! This can't happen to me. The whole thing is crazy." They tore their gaze away from each other, and the man spoke, trying

to make his voice sound casual despite the rapid beating of his heart.

"My mother has a theory that very few people are born into their right places," he smiled. "Even old Jupiter here would have been a sacred animal in a far-off land—here he's a bit of a nuisance. Perhaps you were born in the wrong place."

Constance laughed, and looked at her wrist watch.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "I'll be late for tea. Where is this path—please don't come, I shall find it. The boys said I can't miss it." She turned quickly and passed out of the barn, hurrying down the slope to the river. The man stood staring after her, then turned and spoke to the bull. "Well, Jupiter, old chap, all I can say is 'God help me!' "

Swiftly Constance followed the path through the scrub and came out at the back of the Ranch house. What had come over her! One of the Ranch hands! There had been a sense of intimacy, to put it mildly, no use denying that. She was furious with herself. This was a mad land, and it was making her a bit mad. She was a different person from the one who had stepped onto the boat in an English port. She had just made a complete fool of herself.

She went around to the front of the house, and with relief saw that the car was standing at the gate. The others had arrived. She slipped quietly in the door and joined them in the Big Room, glad to be within doors, closed in from a land whose strangeness excited, yet frightened her, safe again with Sir Brooke and Lady Denton, with these new friends, snug in a fire-lit room that shut out wild horses, white bulls, cowboys in fantastic clothes and a man, golden and beautiful, who had looked upon her with love and desire in his eyes.

Chapter Six

CONSTANCE dressed for dinner with extreme care. It was as if, having slipped into familiarity with three workmen on the Ranch, and feeling closely identified with life on the place, she must pull herself back to the reserved English girl she really was. She chose a smoky-blue chiffon, which brought out the colour of her eyes, and defied the beholder to find a flaw in her skin. The wide cerise belt could only have been worn by one whose figure was perfection. She dressed her pale gold hair high, and screwed on her star sapphire earrings, the only expensive present that she had ever allowed Brooke to give her, and then only to mark a very special occasion. It had been in Paris. She sighed, and was suddenly tempted to take them off, but a memory of Brooke's face, as she had seen it at tea-time—weary and almost old, filled her with pity for him, and love—she hoped.

She went to the window, and drawing back the curtain gazed out, exclaiming in sudden wonder at the glow that filled the sky from the gas flares, looking like giant candles burning. "The oil fields," she thought. "It must be. It looks like the vestibule of hell." Then she heard a long low whistle, and a laugh. Two cowboys were standing in the lighted doorway of a bunk house, far down at a cluster of buildings. "Clem and Slim," she chuckled. "My pals," and waved her large chiffon handkerchief. Then pulling the curtains, she made her way to the Big Room.

Arthur, a drink in his hand, was the only one there. He jumped up eagerly.

"Ah, here you are. I was wondering what had happened to you. I'll pour you a drink. No cocktails at the Ranch—just Scotch. The Mater says that is what they used to drink in the old days, and nothing must be changed out here. A pity—I mix a wonderful cocktail which I invented myself."

He handed her her drink and sat near her, babbling of Paris and London. Constance was glad to have this opportunity of sitting in a great chintz-covered chair gazing into the fire, trying to collect her thoughts before the others came. Her brief encounter with Clem and Slim at the window had brought back disturbing memories of the afternoon. In a few minutes the others came in, one by one.

Tom Lacey, the ranch neighbour, who had sold his place to an American oil firm arrived only seconds later, with his wife. He was a tall sun-bleached man with a ravaged face, and twinkling eyes, but as he frankly admitted, he was beginning to sag. His wife, a gentle white-haired wisp of a woman, had raised twelve children, lived through blizzards, drought, grasshopper plagues, dust storms and forty below zero temperatures, had handled the family finances, mothered the Indians, bossed her husband unmercifully, and had enough energy left to take it all on again.

They sat about, their glasses in their hands, chatting amiably about nothing. Sir Brooke had his charm turned on full, and was delighting Mrs. Lacey. Tom Lacey and Lady MacKenzie were entertaining Lady Denton. "Remember, Margot—?" Jack Steele, Trevor Holland, Arthur and Constance formed a group by the window. Constance said little. She was happy that Brooke was in a gay mood—for he could be difficult if he was not amused. Obviously he was enjoying himself. But where was Janet? Just then, Janet entered—at her side the man Constance had talked to in the cow barn. The girl's heart turned a somersault, and the colour crept up her soft slender throat.

As the men rose, Tom Lacey boomed out—"Janet, my dear—it is good to see you. More beautiful than ever. Well,

Ian, how is the farm coming? You'll never turn Ranch land into farm land. Better sell it for oil."

Ian stooped and kissed his Mother, then made the round of introductions with Janet. His eyes smiled when he met Constance's amazed look, but neither gave any sign that they had seen each other before. As soon as his greetings were over, he came to Constance, who had collapsed on a chesterfield and drained her glass.

"Miss Howard, let me get you a drink. Your glass is empty." When he came back they sat silent for a moment smiling at each other.

"We *do* surprise each other when we meet, don't we?" said Ian, holding out his cigarette case.

"You certainly surprised me this afternoon," Constance said. "Because you looked like a golden statue in a golden haze. One does not go about cow barns expecting that, even in this rather fantastic country."

"And you surprised me, because I had been looking for you all my life, and had not expected to find you when I was forking manure. Wretched timing, that was."

"So you are Ian—your mother spoke of you, of course, but I did not realize that you lived out here at the Ranch."

"Yes," Ian said. "I'm the sport of the family tree. I don't think there was ever a farmer in the family before—a dirt farmer, flocks and herds should be my business, I suppose," he said with a twinkle. "Since I come from a long line of Highlanders and Nomads."

Constance sat smiling, strangely content, and let her eyes wander about the room.

"Well, what do you think of us?" asked Ian.

She turned slightly embarrassed.

"I was staring wasn't I? I was thinking that I had never before seen so many different and strongly marked types in a small group."

Ian looked about him with interest.

"Yes, by Jove, you are right, all but my Mother. She is not one of a type—a bit unique."

"She is indeed—and wholly delightful," responded Con-

stance warmly. "She has made a great conquest of Sir Brooke and Lady Denton. It is odd, you know. We went to dinner at your home in town last night, expecting the usual rather boring time, such as one has on trips like this, and everything was charming. Friendships sprouted up all over the place."

"I'm glad of that. I hope that you will be able to stay for several days. Do you ride?"

"Yes," said Constance, hesitatingly. "But not like cowboys, you know, and I understand that your saddles are different."

"I'd like to take you over part of the Ranch tomorrow morning. I have a mare that you will love—and you'll be able to manage the saddle. A western saddle is as comfortable as a rocking chair."

"I'm afraid I can't go." Constance looked her disappointment. "We are to go shooting. Aren't you coming along?"

"Yes—but we'll be back by eleven. We can ride then."

Ian leaned over to light her cigarette, and his eyes met and held hers over the flame. Happiness flowed through her, and she could feel her heart racing.

"Shall I tell you now?" he asked softly.

Constance's eyes widened, but she smiled, ignoring his meaning. "About your family, your life on the Ranch? I wish you would. When I think of growing up in this lovely old Ranch house away out here in this western foothill country by yourselves, a life so unlike anything that I have ever known, it is like stepping right inside the pages of a western romance."

"It is really not at all romantic," said Ian. "Mother's father was the one who lived in the days when the life in the West was one of adventure. He was one of the earliest ranchers in the district, and my grandmother was the daughter of an Indian chief. He left this Ranch to Mother, and we spent our childhood here. It was certainly a glorious life for Napier and me. If I ever have children, they will be brought up right here."

"Did Arthur like it?"

"No, Arthur, poor devil, had all the disadvantages of people of moderate means coming into money. He was coddled

too much. By the time the rest of us were growing up, the money was rolling in, and we were given the toughening process rich men's sons are put through. But for Napier and me, this place was pure heaven."

"Did Napier look like you?"

"Dark, like Jenny. It is good to speak of Napier to you. When I came back from overseas, I wanted to talk of him all the time. I could not speak of him to Mother. We both felt his loss too keenly and when I mentioned his name before others, they seemed to be embarrassed."

Constance nodded in sympathy.

"I know, I lost a brother in the war and my friends were just the same. We try to keep them alive by talking about them, but people don't understand."

Ian smiled at her warmly.

"We do understand each other, don't we? If you are honest you will admit that we are much closer to each other than two strangers usually are. You see, Miss Howard, our time is so limited that I have to hurry things along a bit."

Constance laughed, and her heart was singing. But she was relieved to hear dinner announced.

Dinner, to Margot MacKenzie's joy, was a great success. The Scotch had been good and everyone was feeling a little hilarious. There was no formality, and conversation was general.

Even Jack Steele was at his best, for the three English guests were an interested audience for a member of Parliament able to tell behind-the-scene-stories of Canadian politics. When Janet talked, her mother smiled happily, rejoicing that her remarks sounded quite impressive. She knew that Janet was a victim of tabloid culture, who read only digests, and digests of digests, and book reviews, and considered herself very learned in consequence. But it went over well tonight. No subject was taken up seriously.

When the great roast of Alberta beef, cooked to a turn, pink and juicy, and tender as only well finished Alberta beef can be, was carried in by George, Sir Brooke rose and proposed a toast to it.

"Don't look so shocked, Gwen and Constance. Since when have we seen a roast of beef like this?"

Poor Trevor Holland groaned inwardly. Twenty pounds of prime beef if an ounce, at seventy-two cents a pound, and he supposed these people thought they had just gone out and hacked it off a steer. When *would* Margot grasp the fact that she was poor now? This party, small as it was compared to those of the old days, was going to cost a pretty penny. He looked across the table at Margot, dear, dear, Margot, and she smiled warmly back at him.

Constance and Ian sat side by side, tinglingly aware of each other's nearness.

"I think that I'm in love with him," thought Constance, with a sense of panic. "But no—how could I be. It's too silly. I'm a bit tiddly, that's all."

She turned to look at him, and again her gaze was locked in that of those clear hazel eyes, fringed in their thick brown lashes. In them, she saw everything she wanted of life—tenderness, love and passion. She turned away quickly—"I'm crazy," she said to herself. "It's this country. I met him this afternoon in a cow barn."

He leaned towards her. "You know now, don't you? It came just like that, when I saw you this afternoon in the barn," he said softly.

"You are quite mad," she murmured.

"I know, darling, and I hope you are too."

Dinner over, they drifted into the Big Room again. The lights were low, the curtains at the great window which took up most of one wall were not drawn, and the broad land lay still as death in the pale light of a young moon. There was little conversation. The drive, the drinks, the heavy dinner and the gaiety had left each one sleepy and content. The red coals from the fire sifted onto the hearth with showers of sparks. Arthur put some Mozart on the machine and each one retreated into himself.

Then Lady Denton raised her hand. "Singing!" she cried, her face aglow with pleasure. Ian and Trevor winked at one another as Trevor went to the window and opened it a little.

The group drifted over to it. Down by the river a group of cowboys squatted about a bonfire, singing cowboy songs. Constance recognized Clem and Slim among them. A swarthy man was strumming a mandolin. The boys seeing the people gathered at the window, raised their voices in a plaintive dirge. When the song was finished, there was laughter among the men, and a bottle was passed around the circle, each man pouring his drink into a tin cup and tossing it off.

"Don't they take anything with it?" said Sir Brooke in wonder.

Trevor Holland laughed.

"Not those boys. They drink it straight. They say it cuts the dust."

The man with the mandolin shifted his position, spat with unerring aim at the fire, and struck up a lively air which the men took up, singing lustily. As the bottle passed among them the laughter became more frequent, yells of "yippee" rang out into the vast brooding night. As the men moved about, their long bowed legs in tight trousers, their faces lit by the fire, made a Mephistophelian scene. The people in the room sauntered back to their places and listened while ballads, sad and gay, floated into the room. The voices gave beauty to the night, as the night gave beauty to the voices. The English guests were charmed. "I have read of this. What an experience to really hear them singing these folk songs of the West in their proper setting!"

The singing finally ceased, and the men could be heard laughing and talking as they put out the fire and moved towards the ranch buildings.

The group broke up early, for the shooting party was to leave at seven. Constance, walking along the hall to her room found Brooke at her side.

"I have not had you to myself for a minute," he complained in a low voice. "I must talk to you. I have reached a great decision and I simply must discuss plans with you, for from now on, my darling, it is to be you and me together all the way. We shall travel my new course together. Oh Constance, I

have a job to do—a renunciation to make—without you, I'll never have the strength to do it."

He clasped the soft crook of her arm with a fierceness that told her of his desire. The woman's heart melted towards him. How could she turn from him now, when he needed her so desperately? Just at that moment Ian came through the hall from the back of the house. He paused for a moment, making some casual remark about the morning's shooting. His mouth was a hard straight line in his rigid face. Constance saw his eyes, hard and slightly contemptuous, fixed on her arm, where the marks of Brooke's fingers still lingered. Brooke suggested that Ian come to his room for a nightcap, and a smoke, and the two men left her. She opened her door and slipped inside. Standing against the door in the dark, she rubbed her arm, still feeling the pressure of Brooke's fingers, still seeing that cold look in Ian's eyes.

What had she done with her life? She had made unhappy the past twelve years—the last good years of Gwen's life—Gwen to whom she owed everything, by clinging to Brooke, and now she did not want him anymore. And Brooke! For the first time he had shown her an unselfish love—had found within himself new depths of generosity, and she didn't want his love.

She hurriedly got ready for bed, and lay heartsick, staring through the wide open window out into the dark night of this lonely land. The light wind, fresh from the snowcapped mountains, free from obstructions, whispered through the long dry grass across the vast spaces.

"I must sleep," thought Constance. "I shall look like a hag in the morning, and Heaven knows I need what looks I have since I have nothing else. I am surely the greatest fool that ever lived." Then she wept for all the unhappiness a beautiful fool can cause in her small world, until sleep and troubled dreams claimed her.

The shooting party after a hasty breakfast gathered about the cars, shivering in the cold morning air of the high altitude, exclaiming in wonder at the glory of the mountains, gleaming

beneath the early sun. They stood, a dazzling semi-circle around the rolling foothills, and seemed in the crystal-clear air of morning to be twenty miles nearer than the day before. Ian and Trevor were bundled up in sweaters, shooting vests and old tweed coats, pockets bulging with gloves and shells, their baggy old trousers tucked into high hunting boots, as was Sir Brooke, his coat too wide, the sleeves too short. Constance was almost ashamed of her well-tailored tweed suit, and smart little cap with a yellow feather in it, when she saw Janet. Janet, Constance thought, had gone native. She had a red silk scarf wound about her head, beneath which her hair showed black and glossy as a crow's wing. Over blue jeans and an old yellow sweater, she wore a white beaded buckskin coat, and over her feet she had drawn several pairs of woolen socks encased in moccasins. Hitherto, Constance had only seen her silent, aloof, almost sullen, but very courteous, showing no interest in any conversation unless carried on with a man. This morning, she was gay as a child, laughing, throwing jokes about, helping stow the gear in the trunk of the car.

"Perhaps," thought Constance, "She was *meant* to be an Indian, as I was meant to be the country vicar's daughter. If only we could stay put in life!" When Jack Steele joined the group, Constance smiled inwardly. She was certainly not too much dressed up for him. He was, of course, a recent edition of what the well-dressed hunter wears.

Gwen Denton sat in the front seat with Trevor. Ian and Brooke had been hovering near Constance, each hoping that the other would go in Jack Steele's car, but it pulled away, leaving both men to sit in the back. Gwen turned and suggested that Brooke sit in front also, as it would give him a better opportunity to see the country, but he declined, saying that it would be easier to get out from the back seat if they saw birds. Constance felt a great pity for Gwen as she turned away. She had changed, there was no doubt of that. Something of the "drive" had gone out of her face and had been replaced by a look of resigned acceptance. Ian had paid no attention to Constance, other than a brief "good morning," and her heart was heavy. Would they have their ride after they came back,

or would Ian just disappear on his mysterious affairs about the Ranch?

Brooke's arm pressed against hers, and she knew that she could not postpone a talk with him much longer. He had always taken her complete love for him so much for granted—and why not?—That he might even speak to Gwen of his plans. He was like that. Because of Gwen's strength he had never spared her. But was Gwen strong as she had been—or had it always been the strength of her love for Brooke?

Constance moved restlessly, and looked out on the great sunlit plain across which they were driving. How dreary London would seem now. Gwen and Brooke had made their friends her friends; Gwen's unfailing kindness had seen to that. If she broke with Brooke, and, no longer loving him, her honesty made that inevitable, then she must break with her whole circle of friends, the house-parties would be a thing of the past, and it was those weekends at Gwen's beautiful home in the country that had made the recent horror of the war years bearable. She would go back to London as lonely and empty as those first weeks, when, as a young girl, she had left her father's home. But then there had been hope to help her. She had looked forward to interesting work, a husband, a home and children. Instead of these things, she had allowed her love for Brooke to fill her entire life. She would have to go back and find new work, new friends, new interests. "I can't do it!" she thought desperately. "It would be better if I stayed in Canada—right here in Alberta, since it appeals to me so much." She would not say, even to herself, "Right here by Ian." That short dream was over. She thought of Ian's smile, and his hard eyes at the door of her bedroom the night before.

Brooke broke the silence. He too had been thinking, noting the lack of response on Constance's part to the pressure of his arm.

"You don't use beaters—nor dogs?" he asked.

Ian laughed. "No—no beaters. Some people use dogs, but I can't be bothered with them. I use them for ducks. The Hungarian partridge will likely be feeding in the stubble. That

is what I am looking for now. They post a sentinel, and you will see his little neck sticking up."

"Why the name? I understood that prairie chicken was the game bird out here."

"It was at one time," replied Ian. "But as with so many of our blessings, we have squandered them. The Hungarian partridges were imported. Just a few brace were put out before the first world war, and they throve mightily. They are a game bird to shoot, as well as grand eating—the best of them all, I think. You will be able to judge at dinner tonight."

"And the pheasants?"

"You'll find them any place—strutting across the road, in open fields, especially in the corners, and the brush, along irrigation ditches and streams. This is good pheasant country. We just drive along slowly, see some birds, and go after them."

No sooner had he spoken than Constance cried in excitement. "Birds!" Trevor jammed on the brakes, and the girl pointed to the field. Immediately the wild gleam of the stalker came into the men's eyes. A gun, something to shoot, and the three men became identical; primitive, serious, and to the two women, a little silly. They stepped softly from the car, loaded their guns while they held a whispered conference, then crawling through the barbed wire fence, went off in different directions. The birds rose, the guns barked, and the men ran after their fallen prey, while the rest of the covey volplaned to a far field. The men went in pursuit.

Lady Denton turned to Constance. "I thought you were going with them."

The girl laughed. "So did I, but the minute those wretches saw the birds that *I* pointed out to them, they forgot all about me. As a matter of fact, I'd rather stay here with you, and look at the mountains."

"You *have* fallen in love with this country, haven't you?" smiled Gwen. "I really don't wonder. It is an amazing place, and we have been so fortunate to see this part of it. I never shall forget the singing of those cowboys last night. I was

living those western stories of my childhood which I used to devour."

"I sounded like a fool yesterday, at tea, when I was so vehement about liking it. I surprised myself as well as the others, Gwen." Constance leaned forward, her hands tightly clasped in her lap. "I don't want to go home. I should like to stay here, and find a position in Calgary."

Gwen's face went white. Slowly she pressed out her cigarette stub in the ash tray before she spoke.

"Have you told Brooke?"

Constance shook her head, and tears filled her lovely eyes.

"But you are serious about this?" Their eyes met and in that long look they told each other everything.

Gwen sighed softly. "Poor Brooke," she thought. "Now he will suffer as I have," and she could not bear the thought.

"I think I am serious, Gwen," Constance answered. "I have suddenly become all mixed up. At my age, it is time I tried to straighten out my life, and I think that I could do it here."

Gwen's never failing poise had re-asserted itself. Nothing but a slight trembling of the lighter as she lit another cigarette betrayed how deeply Constance's words had affected her. She sat silent for a moment or two, her eyes on the far-off hills. "If you were thinking of me, Constance, I would say no, but I don't think you are. Obviously, you are not thinking of Brooke—" her voice hardened slightly. She could suffer at the hands of this beautiful woman, and bear her no illwill, but when she brought suffering to Brooke—. She checked her thoughts. She was not being fair. She spoke aloud, as if talking to herself.

"The human element works such havoc with plans and no person is to blame when things go wrong in human relations. Well, Constance," she spoke with more force. "All I can advise is that you think this thing over very seriously. It is a big step to take. If you are reasoning out your problems, and staying in Canada seems to be the answer, well and good. If, on the other hand, your emotions are leading you, be careful. When the emotions are high, the intellect is apt to be low."

Impulsively Constance put her hand on Gwen's arm, lying along the back of the seat. "Gwen," she said, and her voice trembled, "You are the wisest and best person I know."

Again those kind dark eyes met the girl's and held them. No tears were in them, only infinite sadness. "Oh no, my dear, the mistakes that I have made all my life; and so sure all the time that I was right." Suddenly she laughed.

"Don't take my remarks about emotions too seriously. Not everyone would agree with me. I talked with Margot MacKenzie in her room last night. She believes in living by impulses and 'feelings,' the latter, I take it, some sort of intuition by which she sets great store, and which amuses her family greatly."

A car came rushing along the road towards them.

"Here's the other car!" cried Constance. "I wonder if they have had any luck. Our men are certainly seeing birds by the sound of shooting over there."

The car skidded to a stop behind them, and Janet jumped out, and hurried to them, holding up four pheasants.

"Four!" exclaimed Constance. "Oh, Janet, aren't they beautiful! Where did you get them?"

"We shot all of them down in the far coulée." She was dirty, her jeans were torn, her face was radiant.

Jack Steele came up to them laughing. "Go on my girl, tell them that you shot all of them. You are just dying to."

They all laughed. "Well, I did." she grinned. "Jack will never get birds if he won't go after them. He stands on the edge of a bit of brush, and looks at his beautiful clothes."

"Yes—and helps detach you from barbed wire. I don't like crawling on my belly under fences."

"You're too fat to get under," jeered Janet. "Aren't you shooting, Constance? There is another gun in the car."

"I wouldn't shoot anyway," laughed Constance. "But I did think I'd roam the fields with the men. I was the one who saw the first birds, and my reward was that they completely forgot me, and set off without a backward glance."

"Better have a drink to console you. There is a thermos.

How about you, Lady Denton? Need something to warm you up?"

"Now that you speak of it, I am a bit chilly. Why, I can't imagine. The sun is so bright."

"That old altitude again," laughed Jack. "It will be warm enough in another hour."

Janet got into the car beside Lady Denton, and Jack, after rummaging about in the trunk of the car, came out with a great hamper of roast beef sandwiches and a large thermos jug. He sat beside Constance and poured the hot drinks while Constance handed out the sandwiches.

"We don't have servants meeting us with wonderful spreads, as they do in Scotland," he said to Lady Denton, handing her a steaming cup. "For one thing, the beggars wouldn't do it for us."

"But this is so much better," she said to him. "And I am afraid that we are not going to be pampered any more at home, either. I think that those days have gone, and perhaps it is a good thing."

"Come the revolution," he laughed.

"As a matter of fact, there is a continual revolution in Britain. We stand up against the people as long as we can—they become more insistent—then we give a point, and so it goes on. Soon there will not be many more points to give."

"You are in a sweet mess now, with the Labour Government of yours."

"But is the Labour Government responsible for the mess?" countered Lady Denton. "Don't you think that the depression and the war had something to do with it? They were not in power then."

"Why Gwen!" exclaimed Constance in surprise.

"I know," nodded Lady Denton. "I sound crazy to myself too. But I have been thinking for some time that instead of berating our Government for all our miseries, we should be profoundly grateful that they were elected. I believe that a Labour Government in power in Britain had as much to do with keeping Western Europe from going Communist, as the Marshall plan has. It stiffened the position of the vast liberal

element. We are apt to forget how people were thinking immediately after the war. With reason, they were profoundly suspicious of the privileged classes, and at that time not afraid of Communism, for they knew little about it."

If Constance was pleased and surprised to hear Gwen speak thus, Jack Steele was flabbergasted. These queer English! And she was rich; her family big shots! When conversation got beyond him, he had one remark which brought things back to his level. "Well, let's have another drink," he suggested.

They held out their cups while he lifted the large thermos jug.

"Are we leaving plenty for the others?" asked Gwen. "I'm sure I must be eating more than my share."

"Loads," Janet assured her. "Wong always sends along enough for a regiment. By the way, Constance, Ian said something about taking you for a ride when we get back. I wondered if you had riding togs with you."

Happiness flowed through Constance. So they would have their ride. "He mentioned it last night," she said. "When I said I'd go, I never thought about clothes."

"I'll lend you something—we are about the same size," offered Janet. "Here come the others."

The men were striding across the fields, partridge hanging from their hands.

"They have had good luck too," said Lady Denton happily. "It has been such a wonderful morning. Brooke has had no shooting since before the war. This is great fun for him."

The morning was warming up. They stood about the car eating their lunch and telling of their experiences. Ian made no effort to be near Constance, but confined his attentions to Lady Denton, showing her the partridges they had shot, telling her of their habits—their fantastic dancing. Constance's happiness was dimmed. Perhaps he had spoken to Janet of riding with her before he had met Brooke and her in the hall. He was a simple type, who would never understand nor pardon her relations with Brooke. She wished she had not spoken to Gwen of staying in the Canadian West.

As Janet turned away to get into the other car she said,

"You and Constance are riding when we get back, aren't you Ian? I'll lend her some riding things."

For the first time that morning, Ian turned directly to Constance and smiled as he said with something of his former warmth. "If Miss Howard will not be too tired. We made an early start this morning."

"Oh, no, I am not at all tired," Constance cried eagerly. "I am looking forward to looking over the ranch."

"Splendid! Will you sit in the back Trevor? You are so afraid this old bus won't hold together that you are afraid to step on the gas. We shall have to hurry if we we are to get a ride in before lunch."

The drive home was made almost in silence. Constance saw the look of resentment on Brooke's face, and knew that he had hoped to have this time with her. There would be no opportunity in the afternoon, for they were to drive to the Turner Valley oil fields immediately after lunch. She realized with something of a shock, that never before, since she had known Brooke, had she done other than fall in with every plan of his, no matter how trivial. No wonder that she had lost the power to make decisions for herself. But she had spoken to Gwen, and in so doing she knew that she had taken a first irrevocable step towards a new life with or without Ian.

As the car approached the Ranch, two cowboys were herding cattle down to the river to drink.

"Oh please, Mr. MacKenzie," Lady Denton cried. "Do stop the car and let us see this!" They all jumped out, their faces alight with interest. When the cattle had drunk, the men drove them through the water. The beasts, bawling and stumbling through the stream climbed the opposite bank, the men, like slim brown centaurs, yelling and chasing them as they galloped up the steep face of the hill. They reached the pasture across the river, and dust rose in clouds over the ground as the beasts scuffled about, running stupidly here and there, the men racing after them, pulling their horses back on their haunches as they turned sharply. They yelled and waved their hats, as one of the horses, a wiry black brute, bucked frantically, trying to throw his rider. The other cowboy,

rising in his stirrups, threw his rope with unerring aim, and brought down a young heifer, running in panic away from the herd.

"That's Clem," cried Constance excitedly. "Clem threw the rope. That's Slim, the one on the wild horse." Gradually the excitement subsided. The cattle were driven through a gate and disappeared over a hill, leaving clouds of dust in the air. The onlookers climbed back into the car, and Ian started it again.

"Well, now I have seen everything," exclaimed Brooke, with satisfaction. "How lucky for us that we came along just at this time."

"The real West," smiled Gwen happily. "Wait until I tell my brother about those riders. He rather fancies his riding."

Trevor was actually blushing with embarrassment. Ian shook his head, a secret smile on his face. "That Mother of mine," he was thinking. "She should have been running a circus all these years. Well, she had done the next thing to it—she has raised us."

Suddenly Brooke looked at Constance curiously. "Slim and Clem. Now what on earth do you know about Slim and Clem?" he asked.

It was Constance's turn to be embarassed. She could not bring herself to speak of her adventure of the day before. That was her own, every bit of it, and she would not share it with Brooke.

"Just a couple of my cowboy pals I ran across yesterday," she answered lightly, and heard Ian laugh with delight as he turned and threw her a quick smile. All at once things were right again between them, the bond had tightened. She knew he was thinking of their first meeting in the great cowbarn, and happiness coursed through her.

Chapter Seven

WHEN the car drew up at the Ranch house, Trevor walked straight over to his small house, and entered his office. Lady MacKenzie was sitting in an old easy chair by the desk.

"Well, my dear," he said, slipping off his shooting coat, and his jacket, and seating himself behind the desk, "It is good to see you."

"I must talk to you, Trevor. So many things of importance have come up. Did you have any luck?"

"Splendid. Got our limit. I like these people, Margot. It is the best little house party we have had for a long time. They are your sort. You have fooled around for years with some pretty poor trash. Calgary is not like it was,—too many newcomers, all on the make."

"I was sure that you would like them. Ian does, also, thank heaven. At least he is staying with the party, and if he did not like the people, he would just put on that disappearing act of his. He is so different from the boy he was when he went overseas. He does not leave the ranch if he can help it, never looks up his old friends in town, never comes in to a party."

"Don't worry about Ian," said Trevor sharply. "That boy has more sense than all the rest of you put together. He has been through a lot and he misses Napier. But he is finding his way again and it's a damned good way, if you ask me."

"Well he does seem more like his old self, this time. I

appreciate his giving up his work for two or three days, and you too, Trevor."

Trevor smiled. "I don't think Ian minds the sacrifice one little bit," he said, sticking his thumbs in his belt and sitting back comfortably.

Lady MacKenzie leaned forward quickly.

"Trevor, you don't think—?"

"The lovely English girl? But I *do* think. And why not?"

"Oh no!" exclaimed Margot. "It can't be. That would not do at all."

"Again, my dear, why not? Ian is a well-educated man and a damned handsome one. Any woman would be lucky to get him."

The woman looked troubled. "It is not that, Trevor."

"You think that she could not settle down to life on a Western ranch? Other English women have done it, and have given up more than she had, to do it."

"No, not that," Margot hesitated. "That is one of the things that I want to talk to you about, Trevor,—Ian and the Ranch. I don't want Ian hurt, just as he is finding himself again, but I cannot see how—" She looked up at the man, saw the beginning of a frown on his face and swerved her direction. "I cannot see how he can avoid being hurt if he has fallen in love with this girl. I might just as well be frank, Trevor. Sir Brooke and Constance are in love with each other."

"Nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense."

"Well, I can tell you one thing. She may have been in love with Sir Brooke but I'll bet money that she is falling in love with Ian now."

Margot settled back into the lumpy comfort of the old chair. "Whether she is or not, Ian is in no position to marry. He cannot make a home for any woman just now and heaven help her, if she married him and had to live with Arthur, Janet and me."

Trevor tilted his chair forward and leaned across the desk. He spoke with great seriousness.

"Ah, now we are coming to it Margot. I saw you switch off the real reason when you saw me frown. You poor dear—you have lived with difficult people so long that you have ended up by trying so hard to please everyone that you please no one. There is no use avoiding difficult subjects with me, just because I look cross. What is wrong with Ian and this girl living right here—in the ranch house—, if they married. The boy would not be happy any other place now."

Margot MacKenzie braced herself with a long sigh. "That is what I came over here to talk to you about, Trevor. Jack Steele thinks that we have oil here. He wants to form a company and buy the ranch."

Slowly Trevor searched for his pipe, filled it and tamped down the tobacco.

"So that is why that punk is in on this party! At any rate, I am glad that it is not because Janet wanted him."

"What do you know about Janet and Jack?" asked Margot sharply. "Good heavens, you hear more gossip away out here than we do in town."

Trevor frowned. "I hear plenty about Janet and Jack Steele. The woman is a complete fool, but she had better watch her step with that man. He is infatuated with her, that is obvious, but he is as hard as nails. Why the devil does she want to mess around with trash like that?"

"She's restless," said her mother pleadingly. "You know what Janet is like. She is attracted to him—don't ask me why, with that fat neck of his. She has to have excitement and I suppose he is all that Calgary offers at the moment. She should get away."

"Yes, sure," cried the man derisively, "I suppose she thinks that you should finance a trip abroad for her. And how she could spend the shekels when she got there! No, I am warning you, Margot, that is out. There is just no money for that kind of thing. I suppose," he knocked out his pipe and filled it again—"it never dawns on her to work off some of this restless energy by getting a job."

"Oh, Trevor," the little woman shook her shoulders impatiently. "Janet would never take a job. And what could she

do, anyway? That is my fault. As far as I can see, she has been equipped and trained for nothing but seducing men."

Trevor laughed, his wide smile lighting up his tanned, dour face.

"Well, let us get back to Steele. What is his proposition?"

"He wants to form a company, buy the ranch and drill for oil."

"No!" the man exploded. "I'm damned if he will."

"But Trevor—!"

Lady MacKenzie leaned towards him, troubled, looking young and helpless, and the man's heart melted. He spoke gently.

"Margot, I've schemed and worked to keep this place clear. It is the one solid asset that you have. It is Ian's future. Steele is not going to get it. Moreover, I doubt if there is oil this far west."

"The Double Circle is drilling."

"Yes, they are drilling on the Double Circle, but who is drilling—a great American Oil Company that has already spent millions looking for oil in the Province. To them, a dry hole is all in the day's work. They count these test wells as part of their expenses. I don't trust Jack Steele, nor do you. But all this is neither here nor there. You are keeping this ranch and you are keeping the oil leases and, when I say that, I am thinking of you—I *am*."

"He half-threatened me about the taxes on the town property."

"He would," said Trevor, contemptuously. "Well, let the town property go. All of it should have gone long ago—as soon as they brought in rent control. I told you that at the time."

"But the house, Trevor!" cried Margot in consternation. "Can you picture Janet and Arthur living out here?"

"If all Arthur wants to do is paint his daubs and read his books, why can't he do it out here as well as in town?"

Lady MacKenzie's face flushed with anger. "You know that you are talking nonsense. Arthur would be lost without his little dinners and cocktail parties, when he gathers the

would-be intellectuals of the city about him. It is his whole life now—and he really is not strong. I know you and Napier and Ian have never believed that there was much wrong with him—but there must be. If he were well, if his heart did not bother him, do you think for a minute that he would not have more energy and ambition?"

Trevor snorted. "Then the ranch will be good for him. As for Janet, if you had an ounce of sense—if just once you would have the courage to stand up to her tantrums, you would tell her that she had two choices—the Ranch or a job."

"Well then," asked Margot, throwing out her hands with a shrug, "what about me; what would I do?"

"You'd marry me and come out here and live in this house, as I should have insisted on your doing years ago."

"Why, Trevor," she cried in amazement. "This is the first time you have ever suggested such a thing. Do you know," she grinned, "I was thinking of that very thing at dinner last night."

"I know," nodded the man, "I caught the gleam in your eye. That is why I brought it up now."

They laughed delightedly.

"Of course, Trevor, I have known for years that you loved me. Why did you never mention marrying me before?"

"Don't know," he frowned. "At first there was always some man hanging around. No wonder you have sympathy for Janet. Then—well, you had money—and well, things just drifted along."

"Have you a cigarette?"

The man reached in a drawer and took out a box. After he had lit it, they settled back in their chairs, smiling at each other.

"This is the strangest little party," mused Lady MacKenzie. "Janet is falling out of love with Jack Steele because he does not show up well among the other guests. Constance is falling out of love with Sir Brooke and in love with Ian. Ian is falling in love with Constance. If only Sir Brooke and Janet do not fall in love with each other, perhaps he will fall in love with his wife."

"Now that is being optimistic," jeered Trevor.

"Well," said Margot indignantly, "she may not be particularly handsome but she is the finest person I have met in years."

"I agree," nodded Trevor. "As a matter of fact, I like her very much indeed—and I don't agree with you that she is plain. She has a fine strong face and her eyes are beautiful."

"Her eyes!" cried Margot, her own three-cornered hooded eyes flashing. "They are big cow eyes." She glared angrily at Trevor.

He roared with delight. "Spoken like a bobby-soxer," he said. "I believe that you *do* like me."

"Of course I do. After all, we are engaged to be married, aren't we—or are we?"

"Well, as you intimated, this is a cock-eyed party, with everyone falling in and out of love. I see no reason why two oldsters like you and me can't become engaged. At that, I'll bet I'm not ten years older than that handsome beggar Sir Brooke."

They sat silent for a few minutes. Lady MacKenzie was thinking that the long years of loneliness were ending for her. She would have the comfort of the love and companionship of this good man—and her soul was filled with a deep content. Practical problems were brushed aside. Trevor would manage things. As for the man—he had been faithful in his love for many years. He was a giver in life, not a receiver. Much of his passion for this woman was spent but he still loved her, still wanted the right to care for her and protect her.

Finally Margot MacKenzie spoke. "I wish you had asked me to marry you years ago, Trevor. Why didn't you?"

"There never seemed to be a proper time to do so. When your husband died I was no longer secretary to a Cabinet Minister—I was the manager of your ranch."

"I ruined your career, didn't I?"

"You think that, because I left Ottawa and came out here, instead of looking for another post when I found I could no

longer work for Gordon. No—I left Ottawa because I was completely fed up with the east. I was born in the west. It was just a chance that, because I was in Gordon's law office when he was elected to the federal house, he took me there as his secretary. Then, on that day, when he found you in my arms as I was trying to console you because you had just found out that he had a mistress—though heaven knows all Ottawa knew about that affair—when he raged and stamped about, building it up into a great *affair passionelle* when he knew there was nothing in it, I hated him. I had stayed in Ottawa because of you. When I realized that he was putting on this act to get rid of you, there was no need of my staying there any longer. You were in no way responsible for my coming to the Ranch. I could have continued my law studies. People are seldom responsible for another's actions. That is why different people react differently to the same situation and keep politicians in power."

"Do you know, Trevor," mused Lady MacKenzie, "it was several years after our virtual separation that I realized Gordon knew there had been nothing between you and me. It was a comfort to my pride to believe that I had hurt him past all forgiving and it was from that that I deduced this other woman had been just a passing fancy. Gordon was always hard and unforgiving. Later, of course, I knew that it was all nonsense. He had just used the scene between us as an excuse to get me out of Ottawa. He imagined that I endangered his ambitions. Indian blood was not as casually taken for granted in Eastern Canada as out here. It was then that the black days came—the days of humiliation. I knew that I was, not only no longer loved, but that I never *had* been loved. He had married me because my father was wealthy and influential by Western Canadian standards."

Trevor hunched his shoulders as he thrust his hands into his belt.

"Yes—Gordon got a bit too big for his britches about that time. Strange, that woman helped him on his way, just as you had, yet it was because of her that he never rose as high as

he wished. There came a time when he would have given half of all he had to be able to deny her and have a wife and four handsome children at home in Ottawa. Canadian politicians can't mess up their family lives. Perhaps that is why the bachelors get places,"—he finished grinning.

"Who told you that eventually his mistress had held him back in his career?" Margot asked curiously, her dark bright eyes on him.

Trevor pushed his chair back from the desk and stood up. "Pleased about that, aren't you?" he laughed. "Her husband told me. And now it is time for lunch. I'm going to eat here, and I can't go to the oilfields—too busy—but I'll be over for dinner."

He followed Margot to the door, where she turned.

"Trevor—we haven't discussed one of the problems I came over to talk about. We have, like the two old people we are, talked of the past and settled nothing for the present and future."

"We've settled that we are going to be married," said the man, smiling down at her. "In my life that is quite a problem settled."

The woman looked up at him—her face, with its fine bones, its generous mouth, beautiful.

"People will think that we are a couple of old fools—but, Trevor, I am so happy! I need you so."

"That is all I ask of you, my dear—all that I have ever asked."

He took her in his arms and she clung to him. "Life had become so stale and I did not think anything could ever change it. Now life is good again."

"It will be a change, all right, Lady MacKenzie," Trevor laughed. "Mrs. Holland will be just another woman living on a ranch, with Wong and Annie to look after her, I hope. They will be our one luxury."

"Can we afford that, Trevor?"

"Well, I've a bit of money, you know, and, of course, Wong and Annie would not leave you."

"That is all I want for myself, Trevor. But the children—."

"Oh, damn the children!" said Trevor brusquely as he released her and opened the door. "This is our day. I have waited years for it. Now, along you go to lunch—and don't worry. Just make up your mind that you can't please everyone."

"I'll stay over the weekend," she called back. "We'll figure things out then. And we shall tell Ian—no one else."

Chapter Eight

IAN brought the horses around to the side gate where Constance was waiting for them. She had feared that they might be shaggy and wild western animals, such as she had seen at the cinema, galloping madly across the prairie. She cried out with delight when she saw him leading up two beautiful Palominos and called to Gwen and Sir Brooke to come and see them. The horses stepped restlessly about before their admirers.

While the riders mounted, both horses with western saddles, Brooke stooped to examine a stirrup and said in a low voice to Constance—"Don't be long darling. I must see you before lunch. We have a thousand things to talk about." Then straightening, he smiled and said,—"How do you like the saddle, Constance?"

"It's like a rocking chair," she chuckled. "Surely I can't tumble off with this thing to hold to." Her eyes were shining and the breeze had whipped colour into her cheeks. Brooke was looking up at her, his face holding that tight, folded-in look which Gwen knew so well—the look of a man who can deliberately pull down a curtain to hide his emotions and which twisted her heart more than if she had seen love for this girl blazing from his grey eyes.

To spare herself, she turned to make some remark to Ian and was almost startled into an exclamation. Here no mask was up. Love shone in the man's eyes as he leaned from his

saddle towards Constance and, in that look, was also the arrogance of his thirty-two years against Brooke's fifty-two—the assurance of vitality and health which glowed from his golden body, seated on his golden horse.

"Oh," thought Gwen sadly. "So that is it." She knew that she should be glad but all her love for her husband, in which so much was maternal, filled her heart with pity for him.

The riders turned their horses and walked them through the gate, going down by the corrals and fording the stream by a clump of poplars, whose leaves were like shimmering golden coins. To be on a horse again, after several years—to be riding in this gold and blue vastness, breathing the clean air from the mountains—to be riding with Ian—Constance could think of no greater happiness. She wanted to go on like this for miles—not speaking, not worrying about any problems—just savouring every moment.

"This is a long cry from the old side-saddle my father made me learn to ride on," she said at length.

Ian laughed. "I have an English saddle but thought you had better get used to this one."

"Janet laughed when I said that you were going to take me around the ranch. She said that it would take hours, that we'd never get to Turner Valley today. Is it that large?"

"It's pretty large," agreed Ian. "But I'm not taking you around any of it. We are going to my favourite spot, where I take only very special people. Napier and I kept it a secret between ourselves for years, when we were boys. I remember the day he took a girl up there and showed it to her. I was in a terrible rage and could cheerfully have killed both of them. We shall see the countryside for miles from it."

"Is it far?"

"Just a couple of miles. Feel like a gallop?"

"I'll try, but I haven't ridden for several years."

"We'll take it easy then—might get into a gopher hole. I'll go ahead."

They followed a narrow path beside the river for a mile or so, then, emerging from the trees, skirted a small bluff and

began to climb. At length they came out on a high sloping pasture, which they crossed to a clump of poplars. Ian pulled up his horse and dismounted.

"We'll leave the horses here among the trees," he said, as he helped Constance down, and, putting his arm lightly about her waist, began propelling her along a narrow path, still climbing the slope of the field.

"Hadn't we better tie the horses?" she asked.

Ian shook his head. "We don't tie horses here—just leave them with the reins hanging and they will stand until doomsday. Don't think I'm crazy, Constance, but I want you to close your eyes until I say 'Look'. I'll watch that you don't step into a badger hole."

The girl laughed and did as he told her. They climbed for a moment or two, then Ian stopped and cried, "Look." Constance opened her eyes, blinking in the strong sunlight, and was perfectly still. They stood at the edge of the field, which sloped down abruptly into a coulée. Beyond, ringed in by a great semi-circle of mountains, their crests gleaming white in the morning sun, stretched mile after mile of plains and rolling hills, a vast sea of colour—green, red, gold and tawny brown, shimmering into a haze of blue and purple mist at the foot of the great hills. The woman stood breathless before such vast and silent beauty. Tears stung her eyes. She was silent.

At length Ian spoke. "Come down here," he said, as he held out his hand. "This is what Napier and I called our coney hole when we were youngsters." He led her down a short path around the face of the gully to a wide ledge sheltered by the ridge above them, where the prairie grass was dry and warm beneath their feet.

"Ian," she said, hesitatingly, her deep blue eyes on the distant mountains. "I can't find words."

He smiled down at her. "You don't need to say a word, my dear. I read it all in your lovely face. I am so glad that I have never brought anyone here before—that I kept it for you. Your eyes, you know, are exactly the colour of that far-

off blue. I have tried, ever since I saw you yesterday afternoon, to remember what it was that had the same colour."

"Yesterday," cried Constance in amazement.

"Yes—just yesterday. Remember that man on the manure heap you met yesterday?"

"Only yesterday!" murmured Constance, in disbelief.

"That is because so much has happened to us in the past few hours, darling. A year slips by so quickly when life is empty. Fraught with significance, a day is as a year."

"I thought the prairies were green or colourless. It is as if, not only foliage and grass gave colour, but light itself were a tangible thing glowing with colour within itself. Ian—thank you so much for bringing me here. It is the most wonderful thing you could have done for me. This, I shall remember all my life."

A breeze from the mountains began to sing across space. "Song of the High Hills", murmured Ian.

"Whenever I hear that, I shall be here, Ian. Oh, I love this country of yours! It is big and free—and simple."

They stood facing each other. The wind was whipping her jodhpurs close to her long slender thighs, making a halo of her golden hair. She felt love coursing through her, knowing that this man's arms were aching to hold her—knowing that she longed to be in his close embrace.

"Constance," he said, abruptly. "You know that I love you, don't you? Could you be content out here on the Ranch? I must speak now. Our time is so short."

"Ah, that—that is not simple, Ian."

"It is to me, my darling. I love you. If you love me, where are the complications?"

"You don't realize, Ian—."

He put his arms about her and drew her to him. "Constance, darling, look up. Why, there are tears in your eyes. Sweetheart, this is no cause for tears." He kissed her long and passionately. Then reluctantly Constance withdrew from his arms.

"Sit down, Ian," she said, dropping to the ground and patting the grass beside her. "We shall have to talk."

They looked over the wide country in silence. At length Ian spoke.

"You do love me, don't you, dear?" His voice shook with the wonder of it. He stretched out, his head in her lap, gazing across his beloved country.

Constance's hand idly stroked his hair. "I love your hair, Ian. I love your golden look." She laughed shakily. "That is why I stared so awestruck yesterday. I was walking through that cool, dark, empty barn. Then suddenly there was a blazing shaft of sunlight through a door and you stood in it like a golden statue, with golden dust motes shimmering about you."

"Don't forget that I was standing in a manure heap. That may be significant of something or other."

They laughed and, sitting up, Ian took both her hands.

"You'll marry me, Constance? It is a great deal to ask. I realize that. My life is here on the Ranch. It will be a hard and very busy life for both of us—and not much money to spend. You are seeing the country in its best season. There will be blizzards and snowfilled roads. There will be dry summers, when we'll worry about crops, and laggard springs, when we'll worry about feed for the cattle."

"Don't, Ian—," cried Constance in distress. "Don't take things for granted. I can't marry you." She turned her face away but he raised his hand and turned it towards him again.

"Why?" he asked quietly.

"Ian, you know nothing of me. I am not at all the person you think I am. You think I am young and sweet and unsophisticated, just because my complexion is good and I have sense enough, being stupid, to keep quiet when the clever ones about me are talking. The truth is that I am thirty-two and I have lived my life as no sweet young English Miss would ever have lived hers."

Ian sat and looked across to the mountains hugging his knees. His strong face, with its high cheek-bones, was unsmiling.

"It is Sir Brooke, isn't it?"

Constance nodded dumbly.

"Do you still love him, Constance?"

The girl hesitated. "No, I don't think that I do. In fact, I am sure that I don't. Ever since we have started on this trip I have felt a change in my feeling for him. Before that, he was my whole life. I never even noticed any other man."

"And you love me now?"

"Yes, Ian," replied the girl, solemnly. "I love you now, mad as it seems, when we think of our love for each other in terms of time."

He stooped over and plucked a dry blade of grass, pulling it slowly through his teeth. Finally he spoke.

"Then, darling, if you love me and I love you, what is our problem?"

Constance moved restlessly. "Oh, my dear, you don't understand. There were things—how can I put it into words. At the time it all seemed wonderful—infinitely right and fine. Now, as I speak of them, they seem cheap. No—that is not right. It was not cheap. I loved Brooke."

Ian looked sideways at her and, at his warm smile, her very bones seemed to melt. "You mean Paris, Rome—things like that?"

Constance felt herself blushing like a school-girl as she nodded her head.

"But, my sweet,"—and the man's voice was gentle,—"I have been to Paris and Rome too, you know. After all, as you pointed out, we are at that hoary age of thirty-two."

"No, Ian. It is generous and sweet of you but you *do* mind. I saw your face last night at my bedroom door, when I was saying good-night to Brooke."

"Yes, it hit me right in the solar plexus," he agreed. "But I have had the whole night to reason with myself and I swear, my dear, that it makes no difference to me. All that you have experienced in life has gone to making you what you are and that is the woman I love,—just as my life has made me what I am. It is our future that we live together. I did not know that I was going to meet you or, perhaps, I should have left undone many things that I have done. The same holds true with you."

He jumped up and, holding out his hands, drew the girl to him. For a long moment, in the hush of the vast, sun-filled landscape, they clung together. Then Ian looked at his watch.

"Time to go, if we want to be home for lunch. Must we?"

"Oh, yes, Ian. They would wonder."

"And, will you marry me?" He caught her by the shoulders and looked deep into her eyes—smiling.

"Oh, yes, Ian," she repeated in the same voice, smiling happily.

"And, will they wonder?" he grinned.

They sauntered hand in hand towards the horses.

"Is there oil under the ground here, Ian?" asked Constance. "It seems fantastic that there should be. It looks so peaceful —the cattle on a thousand hills and all that. I associate oil with great machines, much rushing about—definitely, a twentieth century industry."

A frown appeared between Ian's eyes. "I don't know. I hope not," he said, abruply.

"But, wouldn't it make you rich? Mr. Steele thinks that there is oil here and says that your mother owns the mineral rights."

Ian stopped in his tracks and turned to face Constance. His eyes were hard, his mobile mouth grim. "So that is why Steele is here! I thought it odd that he was here but supposed that he was mixed up with your party and that Mother could not avoid asking him. Who told you this, Constance?"

Constance looked at him in surprise. "Why does it upset you, Ian? Don't you want to find oil?"

The man turned and resumed his walking, hands in pockets, his head bent.

"I have many reasons for being upset. First, I love the Ranch and have planned my life here, and Mother and Trevor love the place, but there would be no use hanging on to it, if Mother sold the oil leases; it would ruin the place for the very things for which we want it. Moreover, it is our last and only real asset. The ranch belongs to Mother. She inherited it from her father and Trevor has kept it free from debt. The rest of the estate is in a hopeless mess and we are

all to blame for that. If Mother gets rid of the Ranch for cash, it will be the same old story. She and Arthur and Janet will spend the money and they will end up with nothing. I know them. They have no money sense at all. Janet and Arthur keep nagging at Mother for this and that and, until recently, when Trevor insisted that the management of the whole estate be turned over to him, she gave them anything they asked for. Now, there is no money, although it is hard for them to grasp the fact.

"I know that in a few years I can make this place pay. I've dreamed and studied all my life to do just that. No family needs more than a place like this. Trevor sees that it can be done. Moreover, I doubt if there is oil here. I doubt if we are on the structure."

"But, these people who were over for dinner last night—isn't there oil on their place?"

"Not necessarily—and don't forget that our ideas of distance out here are not yours. They live several miles from here, although they are our neighbours."

"But I thought they were drilling for oil there," said Constance, perplexed.

"They are—that is, a big American Oil Company is drilling a wildcat."

"A what?" laughed Constance.

"A wildcat—a test well," smiled Ian. "They can afford to do that. These large companies spend millions locating oil. As for Jack Steele—he is no oil man—he is a promoter, and a crooked one at that. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could see him. He's up to something. Wong told me that he was out here the other day when they were spudding in at the Double Circle. What I can't understand is why he would want to mess around in Turner Valley anyway. All the activity is going on around Edmonton—in the Leduc and Redwater areas."

They mounted their horses and started off at a quick trot across the prairies. Constance wished that she had not brought up the subject of oil, for Ian was silent and worried. Suddenly he burst out,—"That damned crook!"

"Who?" asked Constance—glad to have the silence broken even violently.

"Jack Steele! I hate the man and so does Mother. Surely she would not listen to any of his high pressure salesmanship. I could hardly be civil to him last night."

"He isn't a very pleasant person," agreed the girl. "I think that he was included in the party because he is president of the service club which sponsored Brooke's lecture. He was at the dinner when the subject of coming to the ranch was brought up and he spoke of showing Brooke and Gwen around the oil fields. It would not have been easy to exclude him."

"Of course Janet would not mind that one little bit," broke in Ian bitterly.

"But, Ian," protested Constance. "Why are you so savage in your dislike? Certainly the man is not a gentleman. He may even be a crook, as you suggested, but I think that you are rather hard on him."

She held her breath, waiting for his answer. Was his attitude caused by anger at Janet's intimacy with the man? He had been generous and understanding when she had told him of her love for Brooke but was he sincere? If he felt like this about his sister's affair with a married man, what would he come to think of his wife's? Now, blinded by his love for her, he could overlook it—but later? Could happiness come out of their marriage?

"I know," he said gently. "I know what you are thinking, darling. No, Constance, this is about my kid brother. Jack was just starting on his way up. He and his wife wanted to know the right people and made a great fuss about Gordon. He, poor youngster, fell in love with Jack's wife. They had him over at their house half the time and taught him to drink —and did he drink! His Indian blood told there. He died an alcoholic at twenty—just before the war. He had never had a chance. He came along just after Mother and Father had had some sort of trouble. I don't know what it was. After that Father was in Ottawa most of the time and Mother at home. Trevor was involved in some way."

"Who *is* Trevor? I have not been able to place him in the family."

"He was father's secretary. When whatever happened *did* happen, Trevor came home too and managed the ranch for Mother. He had always been in love with her,—still is for that matter—but that was not the cause of the trouble. I know that he has never been her lover. As for father, there was some woman in Ottawa. Youngsters know a great deal more of what is going on than their elders imagine. As I was saying, Mother was terribly depressed for a time, then went to the opposite extreme—parties at the house, parties at the ranch. Father was hardly ever at home and poor Gordon spent his life at schools and summer camps. He never had the home life the rest of us had. Napier and I had each other. Arthur was too old for him and, like us, not interested in him. When Father died no one gave him a thought.

"Then Jack and Moira Steele took him in charge. Who can blame him for losing his head? We are all as much to blame as Jack Steele for Gordon's tragedy. Perhaps that is why I hate him so much. It is not a model family that you will be marrying into, darling."

"Well, at any rate, it is not a dull one. You won't mention to anyone that we are going to be married, will you, Ian—not yet?"

"Why not?" he asked sharply.

"Perhaps, if *your* Paris friend were at the house, you would not want it blurted out," she said crossly. Then, contrite, she looked up at him through her long lashes, asking forgiveness.

"I'm sorry, Ian. I don't think that you understand how difficult this is going to be for me. I can only cling to the fact that you love me and that will give me strength to do what must be done. This party is, I think, bewitched. Brooke has been making decisions about us the last few days, which will make it even harder for me to tell him that I love you. Please have patience, darling."

"But you won't continue this trip, Constance? You'll stay here with Mother?"

"Ian," she protested, "I must go on to Vancouver with Gwen and Brooke. You forget that I am Brooke's secretary. His chief secretary had to return to London after the Washington conference. I cannot be mean and petty about this. I have received nothing but kindness from both of them. It would be impossible to leave them to handle all their engagements, cope with their correspondence. Surely, you can see that you are not being reasonable to expect me to do otherwise."

Ian, erect on his horse, looked straight ahead. His face was a mask. Looking at his dark eyes, the girl wondered how she could ever have thought they were hazel. His clenched hands, showing white knuckles, showed how desperately he was trying to control himself. A little flicker of fear ran through her. Her heart sank. "I must steel myself against things like this," she thought. "For years to come it will happen time and again. He will fight against it but our love will never be perfect. That is the price I must pay. At least my years with Brooke have taught me to give more to love than I receive. It will be my task to see that my life with Ian is a good one."

"Ian," she said softly.

He turned towards her and, at the sight of her, so long and slender and erect, so lovely on her beautiful horse, so disconsolate, his face broke into a tender smile. He moved his horse over to her and, drawing her face to him with both hands, kissed her gently.

"I am a beast, darling. You must bear with me. Believe me, Constance, my heart knows that it is enough that you love me. That is the wonder and the glory."

Later he said,—"I think what really upset me was the idea of your going away at all. Lady Denton told me last night that you are returning by the Panama. That means that I won't see you again, after you leave here, until I go over to England for you sometime in the winter."

Constance laughed. "If you are as poor as you say and I am as poor as I am, and we are going to be married, I wouldn't think of having you come all the way over to England for me.

We can use the money more wisely than that. I told Gwen this morning that, after we had finished our stay in Vancouver, I was coming back to Alberta."

"What!" cried Ian, his face glowing. "You told her that?"

Constance nodded.

"Were you that sure of me," he grinned—"after knowing me for a few hours?"

"No," Constance said. "But I was sure of something else."

"Darling, you make me very happy. Damn these horses. Every time I want to make love to you I find myself in the silliest places—on top of a horse or a manure heap, or something."

They were laughing as the ranch house came into view. "I'm afraid I won't be able to lunch up at the house. Will you tell Mother? I must talk things over with Trevor. Mother may have told him something this morning. I don't know what it is but I have an idea that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark."

They pulled up in front of the gate and Ian helped Constance dismount.

"See you soon, darling. Try to slip out for a walk with me after dinner."

Turning the horses over to one of the men, Ian walked over to the manager's house, which stood on a bank above the creek. It was a small house, with a wide porch running across the front. At the right of the square hall was a large living room with a fireplace and wide windows facing the water, with a view of the mountains beyond. It was a beautifully proportioned room and here Trevor had gathered the treasures which his mother had brought from England and which had journeyed across the plains of Canada in red river carts. Trevor, true to that loyalty inherent in his nature, had kept the room as exactly like his mother's, whom he had adored, as was humanly possible. When a piece of furniture had needed recovering he had gone to endless trouble to try to match the material. Fortunately his mother had been a woman of impeccable taste and Trevor's room was beautiful. On the

left of the hall was a small office and, behind that, a large bedroom and bath. The kitchen ran across the back of the house.

When Ian knocked and entered, Trevor called to him from the living room. He had just lit a fire and the wood was crackling and roaring up the chimney. He stood with his back to it, a drink in his hand, and looked about him with satisfaction. At last, after all these years, Margot was coming to his home.

Ian came in and looked at the man in amazement. "Well I'll be damned. You drinking in the morning!"

"This, my young buckeroo, is a very special morning," he said, jauntily.

"You'd better pour me one too, then," grinned Ian—"for I have had a very special morning too. Are you going over to the house for lunch? If not, I'd like to eat with you here."

"Spendid," said the older man. "I haven't time to go over there." As he busied himself with the drinks he looked sharply at Ian, who was gazing into the fire, his face glowing with happiness.

"It is the English girl," he thought. "I have never seen Ian bowled over like this before. Napier, yes, several times, but not Ian."

"Well, my boy, what is on your mind?" he asked aloud.

"Jack Steele". Ian repeated what Constance had told him. "Has mother said anything to you?" he finished anxiously.

"She mentioned something about it when she was over here this morning but we drifted into other topics. I should have gone into it more thoroughly with her. She is worried about money. I told her that she will have to give up the town house. I want her to live out here and let Arthur and Janet look after themselves, if they feel they must stay in town."

"But surely, Trevor," Ian said, looking troubled, "Mother would not consider any deal with Jack Steele."

Trevor drained his glass and put it down.

"Ian, I've heard that Steele is broke. He put everything he had into a deal up north and they got a dry hole, but he knows that that is where the oil is. The whole country—Leduc, Redwater, Smoky Lake—is a tremendous oil field and every-

one is scrambling for leases. Don't tell me that Jack Steele intends to do any serious drilling down here. He wouldn't dream of it. All he wants is to pull a fast one and he is counting on using Margot to do it. He thinks he will make enough money out of it to get going up north again."

"Well," Ian said, "if Mother is pressed for money, she is apt to fall for any scheme. You know what she is like. You're right, though, I can't believe that Steele wants to drill down here."

"He doesn't. He will get some good names on the list of directors, sell the stock—give your mother a block in payment. Then he'll put out some false reports and dump his stuff on the market. Of course he'll bring in a rig and make a show of starting things. He has made a pretty penny that way in the old days, but it won't be as easy now. The public will not buy oil stock the way they did in former oil booms. The big American Companies are coming in and investing millions in the new fields. The little fellows haven't a chance. It takes real money and loads of it. The old fly-by-night companies can't get away with their hoary tricks any longer. It's a big industry in Alberta now."

"Did you tell all this to Mother?"

"Some of it. I told her also that the Ranch must not be sold. "Why"—he turned angrily to Ian—"if she fell for this scheme of Steele's, supposing he didn't get oil, you'd soon see that he would have the ranch."

"I'll be damned if he would," exploded Ian. "We're going to hang on to this and we're going to farm and run cattle on it. There will be no derricks, and mud, and snorting engines on the place either."

"Well," Trevor leaned back and filled his pipe, "it all depends on your mother. If Janet and Arthur howl loudly enough, she will do almost anything to get money for them. I can check her to a certain extent but it is her place, the only thing, really, that she has left. The rest has just been frittered away."

"I'll bet Steele talked this up with Janet. That's another

thing. How, in heaven's name, can Janet be bothered with the bounder?"

"Janet's bored. And you know Janet. She has to have a man. In town, the men are too young and unsophisticated for Janet, or married and afraid of her. Your Mother is right. She should not be living in a small city, in the Middle West."

Ian nodded. "I know. She will come a cropper in a place like this. She has been talking Paris again. Of course that is impossible, I suppose."

"Ian," said Trevor, seriously, "You are the only one of your family who has learned how to be poor. Now, the others have to learn that lesson."

"And I don't care how hard it is on Janet and Arthur," Ian said savagely. "But it will be tough on Mother."

Trevor beamed. "I don't think so, my dear boy. I am going to teach her."

"You—how?"

Trevor laughed. "You'll need another drink for this one." He took Ian's glass and, taking his time, poured the drinks and then sat down again, leaning forward, his elbows on the arms of the chair.

"This morning, Margot promised to marry me."

"What!" cried Ian, sitting bolt upright and splashing his drink.

"Yes," Trevor nodded. "She has promised. I shall have the dickens of a time making her keep that promise. Just wait until Janet hears about it. She hates me now because she thinks I am to blame for the lack of money. I have told Margot that we must live here, in this house, and that the town house must go. Well, Ian?"

Ian smiled warmly. "Trevor, I'm delighted." He rose and clasped the older man's hand. "I never shall be able to understand how anyone can have the nerve to marry into this family, but then you have always been considered a member of it; at least you know how troublesome we can be." He raised his glass to him. "Cheers, my dear fellow. This is the second wonderful thing that has happened today."

"What is the first?" asked Trevor, beaming with pleasure.

"That I cannot tell you—not yet."

"Well," smiled Trevor, "I hope it is what I think it is. If so, I must say that things are moving fast at the ranch. Of course, nothing must be said about this. Your mother wanted you to know. Poor Margot is going to have a difficult time with Janet and Arthur before we make it public. It won't alter Arthur's life too much. But I cannot picture Janet living at the ranch. She would go just about crazy."

"She'd drive the cowhands crazy," laughed Ian. "Lord, they would be running for their lives."

"Ian—for Pete's sake!"—Trevor protested.

"I know—but it is so. Think of Janet, with a dozen or more tall, handsome cowboys swaggering about the place, and not another man within miles. Janet, despite her practice, has never learned to misbehave herself properly."

Trevor smilingly agreed. "Well, we shall see how things work out," he said, rising and knocking his pipe out on the fender. "And, now, we shall have lunch and then you'd better telephone into town and get a line on Steele's finances. I know a man to contact. Pity that this oil business came up just now—it only complicates things."

Chapter Nine

THE impact of the oil fields came as an amazing surpise to the three English visitors. They had already been told of the first discovery of oil, of oil booms when fortunes had been won and lost in the space of days; when a whole province had gone mad gambling in shares and money had poured into brokers' offices at such a rate that clothes baskets were used to hold it. They had heard, in the past four days, of the great strides in the technique of drilling and refining, of the influx of the great oil companies from the United States, of all the romance of an industry born from a dream, and a hole in the ground, which had grown to the dignity of Big Business within the short space of a generation.

What they were not prepared for, was the sight of acres and acres of great buildings housing laboratories, administration, machines, supplies. They saw miles of pipes, frosted and gleaming in the bright autumn sunshine, miles of cement walks and roadways, heated by natural gas in winter, so that no shovelling of snow was necessary. In one of the huge buildings Constance, fascinated, watched great black pistons, reaching high into the vaulted gloom above them, slowly dance a macabre dance, as if they too, with the oil and gas, had come from the bowels of the earth, from hell itself.

Brooke, at her side, shouted to her above the roar of the machinery.

"Picasso!"

She turned, nodding delightedly. "The Three Musicians," she cried.

His eyebrows shot up questioningly; then he grinned with pleasure. "The daemonic—in music, and here."

"I wonder if art as we know it will die out of the world—will the creators turn their energies to this," she waved her hand vaguely.

"Heaven forbid!" he cried, and turned to speak to an engineer who was conducting them over the plant. Constance watched the man she had loved as his fine intelligent eyes and keen face were bent towards the other man, following every word he was saying, trying to satisfy, as always, that insatiable curiosity of his. Her heart twisted with pain, cry-out, "Oh, Brooke, I shall miss you! HOW I shall miss you!"

They walked out of the building. About them were the gleaming storage tanks, looking like the silver homes of genie, who squatted within, driving the world to death and perdition at a fast and ever faster rate. The great flares were roaring, giant candles burning to a new god of speed and destruction, and the force of them shook the ground beneath their feet.

Jack Steele had introduced the party to one of the company's chief scientists, who, leading the way with Sir Brooke, had conducted them over the plant. At length, in the comparative quiet near the exit gate, he turned to Sir Brooke. He was a thin, rather small man, with a slight stoop and the fine face of a gentle idealist. His eyes were smiling.

"Well, what do you think of us?" he asked.

Brooke hesitated for a moment. "It is really awful," he said slowly. "Aren't you scientists all over the world afraid of what you are doing? You, as one can see, are a student of mankind and the forces that drive him. Aren't you terrified to give the poor stupid creature such dangerous gifts?"

The man's eyes were troubled for a moment; then he shrugged.

"I think that I am a scientist first. We bring great forces into play, for good or ill. It is up to people like you—men in your position—to direct and control their use."

"But you go too fast for us," expostulated Brooke. "Why, I had expected nothing like this—all this in a generation, and one thinks of all the other plants on this continent, and the atomic projects. It terrifies me."

"And well it may," agreed the scientist, seriously, "for the momentum is increasing hourly. We have almost conquered matter, we are conquering space, in due course we may even conquer time—a fascinating thought, for, surely, that is the greatest of all riddles. But if we can't conquer our own dark souls, we shall have destroyed ourselves by outsmarting ourselves and there is not much time, considering the constantly accelerating pace at which we are moving."

He thrust his hands into his overcoat pockets. "Speaking of the rapidity of scientific and mechanical progress, come and I shall show you the first engine used to pump oil from the Turner Valley field."

He led them over to a small grass plot near one of the gates. There, on a small cement block, was a pump bearing a brass inscription. The piece of machinery was so small that it could have been placed on the door mat of the administration building.

"The daughter of the man whose name appears on the brass plate was here last year, for the unveiling of this memorial to her father, who drilled the first well in the Valley, and she is a young woman. You see what I mean," he smiled across at Brooke. "A generation is a thousand years." He waved his arm in a wide gesture. "And this is small—one tiny cog."

"Yes," Brooke nodded his head solemnly. "I see what you mean. I'm afraid the statesmen of the world are all fiddling while you men are getting ready to burn Rome."

The party passed through a gate and down a road to the cars. The wind had strengthened and was blowing miniature cyclones, laden with dust, across the land. Brooke walked beside Constance and they stood by the cars, waiting for the others to come up. Jack Steele was talking eagerly, probingly, to the scientist as they came towards them. Brooke smiled to himself. No longer did one see the gentle smile of

the idealist, the comprehensive pity for man; the face was stern, secretive, slightly derisive.

"Steele will get no secrets from that man, try as he will," chuckled Brooke. "I've stood facing a man as he is facing Steele, guarding secrets, perhaps in the havoc they have worked, as dark as the scientist's."

The wind dropped, the sun began sliding down the great dome of the sky. As it slipped behind the dark blue mountains, setting the sky aflame with drifting clouds, the world was bathed in livid red light. Constance shivered as she drew her coat close about her. This was the hour she had always hated in the country; its lonely sounds, the stamp of a horse in a stable, the howl of a dog, the wail of a train speeding through marshland had made her feel alone in the world—the last survivor. She had forgotten, in these sunny days, the lonely twilights in the country.

"Cold, Constance?" asked Ian, hovering near.

She shook her head. "The red light. It is like the end of the world. What causes it, Ian?"

"Just dust particles. The wind has been blowing all day. Now it will go down with the sun—I hope."

The sun dropped behind the high hills, folded back, dark and sombre against the opalescent sky. The world seemed to stand still, as a huge harvest moon came up climbing rapidly. They stood speechless, watching its incredible journey. Suddenly a call came from the hills, a weird, unhappy, ululating cry.

Gwen turned a white face to Ian. "And what lost soul is that? Your country terrifies me, Ian. It is too big for me. I have been hedged in too long. I need neat villages running into one another along paved roads."

Ian laughed. "That was a coyote—a mean animal, something like a wolf, but not brave; in fact, a cowardly fellow. Listen!"

He looked up and the others did likewise. In a second they heard the hoarse "honk! honk!" which his trained ears had caught. A flock of wild geese, in wedge formation, necks outstretched, flew high overhead, then another and

another, in their thousands, their deep call filling the air. Heads upraised, they all watched until darkness blotted the birds out, save where a few were silhouetted against the golden moon, and only their searching call came down to fill their hearts with sadness and longing for what they knew not.

A sigh went up from the group of men and women standing by the cars. Constance moved over to Ian and clutched his arm. He could feel her hand shaking and his hand quickly covered hers, pressing it tightly. "I know, my dear. Is it going to be too much for you?" he murmured. "I do wish nature would stop showing all her tricks at once. You are thinking of bright streets, gay restaurants, brightly lit shop windows, aren't you?" he asked shrewdly.

The girl laughed shakily and nodded. She was homesick with such intensity that she felt physically ill. She wanted to love Brooke again, she wanted her old way of life. She resented Ian, who was giving her a new life in a new country —that at this moment she hated. Then she caught his smile, looked into his eyes, full of love for her, and knew that, for good or ill, his way was her way.

"Well," exclaimed Sir Brooke, in a matter-of-fact voice, bringing the rest out of their dark thoughts. "Canadian wild geese! But the numbers!"

Ian moved, shaking his shoulders. "Sir Brooke, you have seen something I have never seen before. Never in my life have I seen as many at one time. I have, of course, seen flock after flock, going to their feeding grounds, flying south, but not as many as this evening."

The flight of the birds had moved each one profoundly. It was as if each one had felt his individual world fall away from him, and he was alone in the night with himself.

To Jack Steele the experience was embarrassing, almost indecent. He moved over and turned on the lights of both cars, making a pool of sanity and security for the group.

"What about a drink to warm us before the drive home?" he called. He felt a little drunk already, as Janet moved towards the car to help him, and found himself wondering

what it would be like if he loved her as much as he desired her. For the first time in his life he had a flash of intuition as to what love could be. He had, of course, never loved his wife. He had been pursued by creditors and had sought sanctuary at the altar, and now much of his wife's money was spent and she was becoming difficult about what was left.

He bent over the seat of the car. Janet, already busy with bottle and glasses from the elaborate leather case, was on the other side. Their heads were close together as they measured the drinks. They looked up and their eyes met. For a long moment he gazed into those green, black-fringed eyes, searching for something to meet a new tenderness that was welling up within him. The look she gave him was inviting, though mocking, but the liquid in the glass was trembling.

"Damn you to hell!" he groaned inwardly, though he knew not why anger shook him, for was not that shaking hand significant? What more did he want?

"I'll pass the drinks. You get in the car," he said abruptly. "Do we have to stay at the Ranch tonight? I can arrange for a phone call for myself, if you can think up something to take you to town."

Janet settled herself in the car, snuggling into her mink coat, and smiled at him, her long green eyes still bright with mockery.

"I'll see your etchings tomorrow, darling," she laughed softly. "Tonight you must talk to Sir Brooke and I must talk to mother."

Jack turned away crossly. Something had slipped away from him, something almost within his grasp, he knew not what. "I hate you in that coat," he snapped. "You look like a fox."

He moved towards the others, bearing the drinks on a tricky little folding tray, the possession of which gave him back some of his self confidence.

"Shall we sit in the car?" suggested Lady MacKenzie. "It will be warmer. Ian can turn on the engine and the heater will make us comfortable."

Holding their glasses, they moved over to the car. Constance felt Brooke's hand on her arm, holding her back. She turned to him reluctantly.

"Isn't it marvellous, Brooke? Not just the refineries and all that, but the whole country?" Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining. The man smiled down at her.

"My dear, I am, I must confess, feeling my age today. That is what Alberta does to me, and I am afraid that old people are not as perceptive as young people. Just as they do not suffer as much with an aching tooth, so they are less sensitive to new scenes and ideas, the ache of beauty, the sorrows of men and the joys of life. It is, I suppose, a process of dying. This country is too new and raw to captivate me as it seems to have charmed you. It is for young people, just as this oil industry is a young man's industry. All these people whom we have met working around here are young men. However, I am going to try to get into it myself. There is money in it. I have been talking to Steele."

Constance stopped abruptly and faced him.

"Brooke," she protested in alarm, "please don't do that. Why do you think of such a thing?"

"Darling." He was looking down at her, her elbow cupped in his hand. "Don't you realize that we are going to need money if we are to carry out our plans? We can't live on love. Even a very small place will take some money. This oil game seems to be the answer. We need money now, at once."

For a moment the girl saw herself and Brooke as two fading flowers in a vase in a sunny cottage window, unheeded, petals dropping, having no part in the life of the room. And then she thought of Ian, as he had stood, his strong tanned arms about her, looking across the great sun-filled valley to the mountains. She had felt love and new life surging through her then.

"Please, Brooke," she urged, putting her hand gently on his arm, her heart aching for him. "Do nothing until we have had an opportunity to talk. Moreover, this Jack Steele is not to be trusted."

"Who said so?" he asked sharply.

"Ian. He says that he is a crook."

Brooke's eyebrows shot up. "Ah—Ian." He leaned towards her, his deep-set eyes searching her face. "Constance, this Ian—you are not—? Oh, no, my dear!"

With a look she warned him of Jack Steele's approach.

"Well, Miss Howard, Sir Brooke," he said cheerily. "Lady MacKenzie thinks that we should be starting for the Ranch. Janet and I shall go ahead and try to stop Arthur from making cocktails. He stayed at home to paint this afternoon, and Janet says his drinks are particularly vile and vicious when he has been painting. It's a sort of compensation to him for his failures, a getting even with the world for its lack of appreciation," he chuckled.

They moved into the glare of the headlights. The long twilight was almost over. A chill little wind, laden with the gaseous smell of the valley, rustled the dry weeds at their feet. Cattle lay dark and somnolent on the flare-lit hills, chewing their cuds as they had since the dawn of history, indifferent to the wild glare of progress about them.

It was with a feeling of relaxation and comfort that the party met in the Big Room before dinner. It was good to drop into an easy chair and enjoy the warmth of the room. Janet and Jack had made good time, for on the table in front of the fire were laid out ice, soda water, and the good Scotch, which their hostess considered the only fitting drink at the Ranch.

"You are quite right," said Sir Brooke. "Cocktails and such have no place here. Nothing but this excellent Scotch would be the perfect drink at this moment." He leaned back, stretching out his long legs to the fire. They sat, grouped in a wide semicircle about the fireplace. Ian, catching his mother's eyes, glanced at Trevor and silently raised his glass. A smile of gratitude played over her dark face.

"He knows, and he is glad," she thought happily. And Napier would have been glad, too. That flood of longing and loneliness, never more poignant than when she felt close

to Ian, poured through her. "Stay with me, Napier, stay with me!" her heart cried, and he answered her, and she knew that all was well—for the moment. She would lose faith again, and doubts would assail her. It was not easy to believe that which could not be proven; and yet, perhaps these inner convictions, these assurances she had—that came for a moment and were gone in a flash—*were* proof.

If Ian approved she would stay her course. It would not be easy. She looked at her children. Poor Jenny, so beautiful and so driven. A woman whose faults needed money to save her from a slough of sordidness. And Arthur, so ineffectual, so gentle. She sighed heavily and felt Trevor's firm hand close tightly over hers, which rested on the arm of her chair. She looked up and caught a warm and understanding smile from Gwen's kind beautiful eyes. She resolved to tell her friend that night, knowing that it would strengthen her own resolution.

Constance said little, rarely joining in the talk about them. She was troubled, realizing that Brooke was going ahead with plans for them both, never dreaming that she would not, as always, fall in with them. In some way she must contrive to talk to him alone, but it would not be easy. She was aware of Ian's eyes on her, his tenseness when she spoke to Brooke, and knew that, despite anything he said, he was jealous.

They were not gay at dinner, as they had been the night before, but a new closeness and intimacy was apparent. Janet, ignoring Jack Steele, now that she was aware, since the episode at his car, of her power over him, gave her attention to Brooke. A woman too strongly emotional to be very intelligent, she had nevertheless a goodly share of wit and superficial knowledge. Lady MacKenzie watched her, amusement on her face, as she listened to her telling Sir Brooke all about the Labour Government of England, and saw that the man was too practised a diplomat to betray his amused bewilderment. Lady Denton joined in the discussion, watchful, as ever, that her husband should not be bored, and soon all but Ian and Constance were into it.

The latter were happy just to be sitting side by side. The girl had always envied the brilliancy of those about her and she sat tonight, reflecting that she had always been with people much cleverer than she was, who had the gift of expressing themselves. She remembered, when first she and Brooke had fallen in love with each other, how eagerly she had studied the problems which absorbed him. She had read voraciously, eager to impress him, but he had only been bored. Her beauty, her love, her sweet, gentle reasonableness had been enough for him. He always stopped a discussion by taking her in his arms and passionately kissing her. She knew that Ian would not be easy to live with. She suspected a hot and violent temper, but she felt completely at ease with him. Here was a man to whom she would say what she thought, without always watching to see if what she was said were pleasing him. She realized at last that such a negation of self, as she had practised to keep Brooke's love, was a crime against her very soul and that rebellion against it was inevitable.

"Why are you smiling so wryly?" asked Ian, softly.

"I didn't know I was," she said. "Listening to the others, I was just thinking how stupid I am. I have no small talk. The few things I know, I am not at all clever in expressing. I think that I am always afraid of saying something foolish. There is Janet over there, taking part in the discussion with such ease, so sure of herself."

Ian chuckled. "I'll guarantee that you know much more about the subject which they are discussing than Janet does. She has a photographic memory. So had father. He could rattle off statistics by the yard, which the deputy minister gave him, after one reading. It was very impressive. Janet doesn't work for anything, not even knowledge—but she can deceive the ignorant. She is not fooling Lady Denton. *That* woman really knows what she is talking about. I don't agree with her point of view, but one must respect her grasp of a subject."

Constance nodded in agreement. "Gwen is clever. Brought up in a different atmosphere, under different conditions, she would have gone far. Her family is one of the greatest

political families of England. She has literally absorbed history and politics through her pores. She is, naturally, a conservative of conservatives. She closes her eyes to the fact that the world is changing rapidly. She imagines that the world has gone mad, after two wars and a depression, and that it will swing back to the nice comfortable world she once knew, where people were content to stay in the place the good Lord made for them, and seemed content to let their 'betters' judge what was good for them. That, of course, was a good deal less than what was good and necessary for her class."

"And Sir Brooke—I suppose he agrees?"

Constance shrugged. "I'm not at all sure that he does now. At one time he belonged to the Labour Party—years ago. Then, on his marriage, he became a shining light in the Conservative Party."

"And you think his convictions are changing again?"

"If they ever were convictions. I don't know. It is so strange. We started on this journey with our ideas and our relations to one another clearly defined. In some fantastic way each one of us has altered."

"I see," said Ian gently. "Lady Denton finds that her husband's success, for which she has striven, is not enough for either of them. Sir Brooke discovers that he has paid too dearly for that success in loss of ideals and life with the woman he loves."

"I suppose so," Constance agreed. "And it is so very late to find out such things."

"And what do *you* want?" A quick frown appeared between his eyes, which had darkened. "Perhaps I was too optimistic this morning, when I said that the whole matter was very simple, since we loved each other."

The girl faced him with troubled eyes. "I don't know, Ian. Perhaps I just want to find myself. And can I do that here?"

"Is it not enough to find love?"

She shook her head. "I do not know. When I am with you I think it is. I found it once, you know, and lost myself in it."

"But, darling, you would not with me. You would find yourself. Do believe me. Real love imposes mutual giving. We would enrich each other's lives."

"Yes," she said slowly. "A man may learn, even that, in time—but perhaps too late."

"So." Ian's brows shot up. "And that is your problem? Well, my darling, I am not giving you up. He had his chance. One favour I *am* going to ask of you again; please stay here with mother. Don't go on to the coast with them."

Constance looked at the man, startled.

"Ian, is is that you don't trust me?"

"I don't trust your kind heart. It is hard to hurt someone whom you once loved deeply, and you are anything but ruthless. I have had so little opportunity to convince you of my love for you."

They had been talking under the cover of a general conversation, which had turned on the oil industry. Here Jack Steele was in his element, quoting figures, painting a glowing picture of the wealth which lay beneath the land.

"Why!" he cried, tapping his hand on the table. "I'll venture to say that there is a fortune right under this ranch—millions—and there," he smiled, looking across the table to Lady MacKenzie, "is the lucky lady who owns it. Most of the mineral rights in the Province belong to the Government, but, because her father settled on the place in the early days, when mineral rights meant little more than coal, gold and silver, the rights belong to Lady MacKenzie. All that is needed are a few hundreds of thousands of dollars to drill."

"That is easily done," broke in Janet. "Form a company. That is right in your line, Jack. Sell the stock and drill and we shall all be rich." She laughed gayly, looking about the table. "Let us form it right now, before we break up."

Constance looked at this family, suddenly become so close and important to her. The soft light of flickering candles painted up the planes of their faces. How strong and handsome each one of them was—and how hard! They looked almost frightening. Then her eyes met Arthur's, and she

suddenly realized that he had scarcely spoken all evening. Her heart went out in sudden pity to him. "Arthur and I," she thought, "we are the weaklings. We have no business with these people." She thought of the other son, Gordon, who had died. There had been no place for him in the family, either, and he slipped out of it. She smiled warmly at Arthur, and he, surprised and pleased, raised his wineglass to her. A warm glow suffused his face. She turned her eyes to his mother. Lady MacKenzie's face was inscrutable, the paper-thin lids over her dark, triangular eyes lowered, as always, when she was refusing to face an issue. Sir Brooke was leaning forward eagerly. Lady Denton's face bore a withdrawn look. Even with taxes what they were at home and the finances of Europe completely topsy-turvy, was it necessary to spoil the delicious flavour of Hungarian partridge with business discussions? *So* like Mr. Steele. Ian's mouth was set, his eyes dark and angry, as he looked across the table at Trevor, as if to say, "You take it."

Trevor took up the challenge. His hand slapped down on the table. "Fine, Steele, fine, Janet! How do you know that there is oil under the Ranch? Ian knows that he can grow wheat on the land. I know that I can graze cattle on it, but what makes you think that we are on the structure?"

Jack Steele turned towards him and spoke with slightly veiled contempt. "They're drilling on the Double Circle, aren't they? You surely don't imagine that that big company would pay what they did, if they did not expect to find oil?"

"That company has spent millions and millions of dollars to find oil in this Province," Trevor said hotly. "And they have drilled a good many dry holes while they were doing it. They don't claim that this well is anything but a wildcat. They can afford to gamble."

"Not such a wildcat," broke in Janet quickly. "Jack had a friend from Oklahoma out here the other day and he thinks we have oil here, doesn't he, Mother?"

"Oil or no oil, no one is going to drill on this ranch." The

furious rage in Ian's voice caused every head to turn in his direction.

"And why not?" asked Janet, coldly. "Is it your ranch? You and Trevor talk as if it belonged to you. You seem to forget that it is Mother's. I suppose that, while you and Trevor fool about with your Herefords and your wheat, Mother can spend the rest of her life in poverty."

Furious, Ian leaned forward. A closed look passed over Gwen's and Brooke's faces. Their English hearts were crying—"Surely not a family row, not here and now!"

Constance pressed her hand on Ian's knee, willing him to be quiet. She glanced over at Trevor pleadingly. She sensed that he was troubled beyond the thought as to whether there was oil on the ranch or not. He looked at her, smiled and jumped into the breach.

"Don't you think that Turner Valley is almost finished, Steele?" he asked quietly.

Jack Steele snorted contemptuously but Constance felt Ian's hand close over hers, as he sat back, and she relaxed, wondering how often in the future she would have to quiet the man's temper.

"Certainly, the Valley is not finished," she heard Steele saying. "They are still taking plenty of oil out of it every month."

"But, what about the fields around Edmonton?" persisted Trevor. "That is where the oilmen are flocking. Consider the prices they are paying for leases. They have millions of acres to file on up there."

"Oh," shrugged Jack, "I don't say there isn't oil up there. We know that there is. But this field is proven—equipment is at hand, the roads are built."

Lady MacKenzie rose abruptly "Shall we go into the Big Room? George will have built up the fire." She moved to the door, with that grace and dignity which she owed to her forebears, and which always confounded those who tried to disparage her because of them. Janet, as she stood up, caught Jack's eye and glanced significantly towards Sir Brooke.

She, she had resolved, would handle Ian. As for Trevor, she would put that employee of her mother's in his place, once and for all. Who did he think he was? Since he had taken full charge of the estate, you would think the money was his, and not her mother's. Her eyes blazed at him as she passed him, going through the dining-room door, and he smiled, mockingly. He'd put that little so-and-so in her place, once and for all, he resolved. She had caused Margot enough worry.

Chapter Ten

IN THE Big Room a great fire of poplar logs was burning and the easy chairs were still drawn up in a wide semi-circle about it, their cushions freshly plumped out. The soft glow from the lamps lit up the gleaming surface of the old furniture and the inevitable low table stood in front of the fireplace laden with bottles, ice cubes and glasses. Through the wide windows, across which the curtains had not been drawn, the broad land lay silent and steeped in moonlight, the night so clear that the mountain tops showed silver-tipped against a cobalt sky. Northern lights shifted in long coloured streamers, the light from them vying with the moon.

With hushed movements, as if in church, they seated themselves, gazing at the glory in front of them. At length Lady Denton sighed softly and, glancing across to Lady MacKenzie, said:

"My dear friend, what memories you have given us for the rest of our lives. I recognize this as one of those moments which will come back to me again and again—a beauty experienced, which one never forgets."

"And think of it, Gwen," broke in Constance, "no drawing of curtains, shutting one in from the night. Instead, we bring the night into us. Lady MacKenzie, do you ever draw the curtains?"

Margot laughed. "Oh yes, Constance, very often. We do have rain, though not enough of it, and drawn curtains are

cozy then. And then there are the blizzards. We are glad to shut them out."

"What is a blizzard like, Margot?" Gwen asked eagerly.

Constance and Brooke looked at each other, smiling. They had never heard Gwen use a Christian name, except with relatives and old school friends.

"Trevor knows more about blizzards than the rest of us," Margot said. "Tell them about last spring, Trevor."

All turned to him and he smiled with embarrassment. "If I'm going to talk, I shall have to have a drink," he laughed. "Come along, Ian, we shall do the honours."

They settled back again, drinks in their hands, and again that little sigh of contentment went up.

"A blizzard has no beauty," began Trevor. "It is like an earthquake or a flood, for a man feels utterly helpless against it. It usually starts gently, a few snowflakes fall, then more—then it is snowing heavily. The wind starts blowing from the North. The temperature drops rapidly and, before one knows it, those first gentle flakes have turned into a screaming roaring swirl of snow and drifts, in which a man cannot see a foot in front of him. If he has not found shelter at the first warnings he is lost. The country becomes a white wilderness. The cattle cower in fence corners and smother to death. If we have blizzards in the late spring, the loss is even greater. The small calves die by the dozens, nothing showing of them after but a little hole in the snow where they were trying desperately to breathe. Feed becomes scarce on many farms and, because the roads are blocked, the only means of delivering it is by plane—a costly business and not possible unless the terrain is suitable."

"But do you winter your cattle out of doors?" ejaculated Sir Brooke in surprise. "Surely not in Canada. As a schoolboy I was taught that Canada is a wilderness of snow and ice in winter—particularly on the prairies."

Trevor and Ian laughed. "We have almost a thousand head of cattle out on those hills," said Trevor. "We have to winter them out. And, of course, some winters we have very little snow. This southern part of the Province is dry country."

"Our winters are much milder than strangers realize," broke in Janet. "I have often played golf until Christmas. Of course, the very next week it may be forty degrees below zero, but the cold spells don't last many days. A Chinook comes along."

"A Chinook? Now what on earth is that?"

"A warm wind that blows through a pass in the mountains. I've heard it is caused by the Japanese current. At any rate, when we have a cold spell, we keep our eyes on the western sky. As soon as we see a bank of grey clouds and, below it a wide straight band of clear blue to the horizon—such a heavenly blue it is—we know the Chinook is on its way. Sometimes, when the Chinook blows, I have seen the thermometer rise from forty below zero to forty above in two or three hours. Then we have days of warm sunny weather again."

Sir Brooke leaned back and took a long drink, then put his glass down. "Well, I'll be damned," he said emphatically. "And no other words can express my feelings. It is a fantastic country—wheat, oil, coal, cattle, blizzards, chinooks, mountains, prairies—a vast, crazy, wonderful place."

Everyone laughed and, under cover of a general movement among the group around the fire, Arthur came over to Constance and sat beside her on the chesterfield.

"I finished a picture this afternoon—it is, of course, just a rough sketch yet," he said, and the little group of pseudo intellectuals and artists in the city, of which he was the doyen, would have been surprised, had they seen the diffidence in his manner. "Will you come with me to the study and give me your opinion of it? I meet so few people who have seen pictures."

"I should like to very much," said Constance. "Let us slip out now."

Arthur led her along the hall to a room at the end of the passage. He fussed with a small easel and a lamp, until the lighting suited him, then placed his picture on the stand. Constance looked at it with pleasure and surprise. It was a painting of a rearing stallion, executed in a modern manner,

since no other would have conveyed the primitive force of the animal. It was a picture of power and savagery.

"Arthur, it is splendid," cried the girl. She was happy to be able to praise sincerely, for she had dreaded being faced with amateur prettiness.

Arthur sighed with relief.

"I am so happy to have you say that. It is much the best thing that I have ever done. I'm a rotten painter, as a rule, but I'd die rather than admit it to the family."

"I can hardly believe that, Arthur, when I see this. It certainly has something."

"You say that it has something," Arthur said eagerly. "What is it?"

Constance pondered. "It is difficult to say. There is something daemonic in it. Perhaps all art has that. I have even seen it in some paintings of the virgin, by old masters, who were painting a universal force, not a gentle mother. You have painted much more than a stallion, Arthur; you have painted a primitive force. I doubt if any other artistic medium than painting could have done it. Yes, you have painted the very devil in that animal. You hate horses, don't you?" She looked at the man curiously and with a new respect.

Arthur smiled wryly, his face glowing nevertheless at Constance's words.

"Yes, my dear, I hate horses"—and his tone was bitter. "God, how sick I have been of horse talk in this place—Ian, Napier, Trevor, Janet, chattering for hours on end about the brutes. I was made to ride all over the country. I loathed the smell of the big things, their coarse hair—their sweat. I was afraid of them."

Constance laid her hand lightly on his arm, her lovely blue eyes filled with pity as she looked up at him. "Poor Arthur," she said softly.

He shrugged. "Oh, it's just a case of not being in my right place."

"Your right place?"

The man waved his hand vaguely.

"My family, the ranch, our small mid-western city—the

schools I attended. Only once did I feel that I was living where I belonged. That was in Paris, before the war. "Oh!" he shrugged, "I was a nobody there, of course, but, for the first time in my life, I was surrounded by people who were interested in the same things in which I was interested. Instead of being thought queer and useless, indeed silly, I was merely thought an amateur, lacking knowledge. But my interests were considered of vast importance. Just before I left I was beginning to get a glimmer of what it was all about. I was sure that I was going to capture my will-o-the-wisp. Then I had to come home, for we were getting hard up."

"Arthur, what a shame!" cried Constance. "I know what you mean about your right place. I wonder how many of us are ever there. Certainly, this past few days I have been wondering if I have been in my right place."

With unexpected shrewdness Arthur said, "You mean Ian?"

The girl looked at him startled, then laughed, "Goodness, don't tell me I carry my heart on my sleeve like that!" Then she sighed, "Yes, I mean Ian. Arthur, am I a fool to think I can change places so easily? Every facet of my life will have to change—my country, my work, my background, my interests, my friends."

"My love," prompted Arthur, surprisingly.

Constance nodded. "Yes, my love—everything. I shall have to become entirely re-adjusted. I wonder if I can make Ian happy while I am doing that. Will he understand my difficulties, my spells of homesickness?"

The man, standing before her, his hands plunged in his coat pockets, looked at her with eyes that were infinitely kind.

"My dear Constance, I am no one to come to for advice. I have made a wonderful mess of my own life. I should have pulled out years ago, broken free of the family, but I was too weak to do it, for I dreaded failure. Our fate lies largely within ourselves. Illness and death are the only things beyond our control. The rest is up to us."

"You have glimpsed your right place, Arthur. You must go to it."

The man shook his head. "I doubt if I have enough

enthusiasm left in me. This picture is the only decent thing I have ever done. It may have been just an accident. You are very sweet and understanding, my dear, and it makes me wish for wisdom to advise you but I can't. I imagine that you have given yourself, your beauty, your passion, your understanding, in loving kindness. Now, if you go to Ian, you will have far stronger and darker motives that that. I say darker—I mean more fundamental and primitive. Ian, despite his education, is a bit of a barbarian, with a mad temper when roused. And he is so damned simple. Will you get tired of that?" He looked up sharply, stopping abruptly in his quick pacing about the room and faced her.

"You will have to find out what you are, my dear, and that is something so few of us know about ourselves. Then go straight to your right place. And I warn you that it is your last chance. We are old before we know it."

In a flash Constance saw again the picture of two pale fading flowers in a window.

"No," she thought, with sudden clarity, "I have life, pulsing life, coursing through me. And I love Ian—just as he is. It is enough." She was silent for a moment, then spoke.

"Arthur, I have, I think, made up my mind about myself. This afternoon, just at dusk, out at the oilfields, I had almost decided to ask Ian to wait for a year before we married. It would give me time to think things out. This country seemed, just then, so vast and lonely that it frightened me. But now I know that I shall stay and marry Ian at once." She smiled. "Even his simplicity, which you deplore, endears him to me. But what about you? Will you promise to go back to Paris, even for a short time—long enough to see if your life is still there?"

He smiled at her. "It was that hope which gave me courage to show you this picture. "Yes, I shall go back, if mother sells the Ranch."

"But, Arthur!" Constance cried in dismay.

The man's gentle face hardened. He moved across the room and, putting the picture on the floor against the wall, snapped out the light over the easel.

"Yes, of course, I understand," he said coldly.

"Am I intruding?"

In relief, Constance turned at the sound of Brooke's voice. He stood in the doorway, his shooting coat on and Constance's fur coat over his arm.

"I thought that I would go out for a spot of air before turning in. Will you come with me, Constance?"

"Yes, Brooke—that is a good idea." Anything to get away from the sight of Arthur's dejected shoulders. "Good-night, Arthur," she said softly.

"Good-night, Constance." He did not turn and Brooke's eyebrows shot up quizzically. Then he shrugged and gestured for silence. They slipped quietly through the dim-lit hall and out the front door.

Outside, the world was still and steeped in moonlight. The Ranch buildings lay squat, pressed against the silver ground. The black bars of the corrals stood out like bars of music. A horse whinnied, and there was movement and restlessness among the other horses, then that unearthly hush again. Constance, as she followed Brooke's light foot-steps along the path that led to the trees, pictured the great white bull, lying, as he must be, all silver in the light that streamed through the window of his box stall.

On reaching the shadow of the trees, Brooke turned and caught her in his arms, covering her face and neck with kisses.

"Darling," he murmured, "it is so long since I have had you in my arms. I could not stand it another minute. Poor Arthur—I am afraid that I broke in on you at an awkward moment. Did he want to marry you, sweetheart? He certainly looked as if you have given him his cachet."

Again he enfolded her in his arms and kissed her; then, suddenly, aware of her passivity, so different from her former eager responses, he drew away from her and stood with his hands loosely locked about her waist.

"What is the matter, Constance? And for God's sake don't say 'nothing,' for something is the matter." His voice was hard.

A sense of weariness swept through the girl; her whole mind

and body were drained of vitality, so that a great heaviness seemed to draw her to the earth.

"Let us sit down by the water and talk, Brooke. I have things to say to you which must be said now."

They settled themselves by the edge of the stream where the waters, rippling over the stones, were like flocks of silver birds forever settling. Brooke stretched out his long body, his arm bent, his head resting on his hand, as he looked at her with troubled eyes.

"What is it, my very sweet? Let us have it," he said at length.

Constance looked at the handsome face beside her, every line, every expression of it so well known. "How beautiful he is," she thought—"a finer beauty than Ian's because he is cleverer, more intellectual than Ian. I must never let myself become ashamed of having loved him, for he was worthy. I shall always be proud that he loved me." Tears welled up in her throat and for a moment she could not speak—then she summoned all her resolution.

"Brooke, it is so hard to say. I cannot understand it myself —but I have fallen in love with someone else."

The man sat up quickly. "Not Arthur!" he cried incredulously.

She shook her head. "No—not Arthur."

"Ah—Ian?"

She nodded dumbly.

The man turned over and lay prone, his head buried in his arms. No word was spoken. The silent night pressed in on them, beneath the moon-obstructing trees. The woman yearned over the man at her side, longing to comfort him, yet not daring to do so. How many times had he caused her suffering in the past—she had endured humiliation and loneliness times without number, yet now she would have suffered it all again, distilled in one moment, if she could have spared him this agony. From a field came the lonely cry of a coyote, searching for dead and lost pheasants in the light of the moon. Constance shivered. Brooke stirred and rose. Holding out his hands, he drew the girl up to him and, cupping her lovely face,

he stooped and kissed her on her wide, sweet mouth, drawing comfort from its sweetness as he had so often in the past. Then, seeing the glint of tears on her cheeks, he took his handkerchief and gently wiped them away.

"Well, that is that, darling. We must be getting back, and very quickly. Janet, if she should hear us, would suspect the worst."

His smile wrung Constance's heart. Silently she followed him along the path to the house and went indoors. Everyone had gone to bed. Only one dim light in the hall was burning. They paused at the door of her room and looked at each other, memories of the past flooding through each one. Then he was gone.

Constance entered her room and, without turning on the light, went to the window and looked out. She had committed herself to a new life; a life that would take more strength of character than she had ever shown. There would be hours of loneliness in the years ahead. She thought of the talk of blizzards and intense cold that evening before the fire. All the vast country about them would be white with snow, the roads blocked, and she and Ian isolated on the ranch. There would be little money, none to indulge in whims, travel, small luxuries and, although she had never had money of her own beyond that which she had earned, her close association with Gwen and Brooke had made the possession of it unnecessary for gracious living. Ian would be busy for long hours on the ranch and she would have to make much of her own life for herself—a new experience. A line of Wordsworth's, remembered since school days, slipped into her mind—"Himself his own enjoyment." She must learn to be that. It would rest with her whether her home was charming and cultured or just another grim, lonely farmhouse in the Western foothills. It could be done. She had seen much, travelled many places. Now, with that background, she would read and study to keep abreast of the world and its doings. And there would be Ian. As she turned on the light and drew the curtains, she was no longer afraid. She had made her decision. She and Ian would build a good life on their love and she was

experienced enough to know that the success of it would rest largely with herself.

Constance was awakened from a deep sleep by a scratching on the window screen. Terrified, she sat up in bed, debating whether to turn on the lamp or not, then decided against it, picturing herself as a target for a wild Indian or a Western bandit, then, fully awake, laughed at herself for her cinema-induced fears. This was the twentieth century. As her eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, she made out the silhouette of Ian's head against the window. Jumping up, she slipped on her housecoat, tiptoed to the window.

"Ian—what on earth?"

The man's face was set and stern. "Slip on some warm clothes and come out. I must talk to you. I'll take out the screen and lift you over the window sill," he whispered.

Fearing that he would be seen by someone if she waited to argue with him, she disappeared into the darkness of the room and slipped into her clothes, groping in the cupboard for a heavy suit and coat, probing in a drawer for a sweater. She went over to the window and Ian lifted her out, his strong arms scarcely noticing her weight. He put her down gently and, in the shadow of the wide eaves, they clung to each other for a long moment; then he took her arm and silently guided her down the path past the corrals.

"If he leads me down that path to the stream which Brooke and I took, I shall scream," Constance thought desperately. "The whole night has been fantastic. All I need now is to have Clem and Slim come and take me for a walk when I get back."

The man turned her abruptly at the spinney and led her along another path to a small bridge. They sat down and let their feet hang over the water.

"Cold?" he asked.

"A little. How cold the nights are out here."

"Yes, even in summer. The altitude," explained Ian.

Constance chuckled. "That altitude again. And is the altitude responsible for this madness? For it *was* a mad thing

to do, Ian." Then, in the waning light of the moon, she became aware of his stern, set face.

Ian put his buckskin coat over her shoulders and pulled her to him, rubbing his cheek against her soft fair hair.

"Darling," said Constance, "what is the trouble? What is it that you must tell me, that could not wait until morning, that makes you look so unhappy?" Fear gripped her heart, telling her how definitely she had made her decision at the window of her room just a few short hours before. She had chosen her path and knew it was the only one for her. "This is love," she thought sadly—"not just joy and rapture and passion but the demanding need of one's whole being." If she lost it now, it was the end of everything for her. She looked at Ian again and she was afraid.

At length the man beside her spoke. "I have just been over to Trevor's house."

"I thought that everyone had gone to bed hours ago. Well?"

"It was one of our family gatherings. How Trevor has put up with them all these years, I don't know. We always go over there, for some unknown reason, for our family rows—and this was an unholy one. Mother has spoilt us all, in different ways. We have fiendish tempers. Did you know I had a temper?" He looked down at her and smiled.

Constance nodded. "I know that, my darling, and you will have to get over it. I am not used to violent tempers. People I have been with at home have learned to control their emotions. If you are going to display hot temper, I shall have to develop one in self-defence."

"Well, at any rate, you saved me from making a fool of myself at the dinner table. It was sweet of you and thrilled me no end. It was just as if you were married to me—such a wifely gesture."

"But what about the row at Trevor's?" Constance broke in anxiously.

Ian sighed heavily. "Yes, let us get back to that. As I said, it was an unholy row. Trevor must love Mother very

much to put up with such things all these years. When the MacKenzie clan goes into action it is really something."

"Ian—please—never mind the family. What is troubling you?"

"Janet followed Mother to her room and began to talk about selling the ranch to Steele's outfit but Mother refused to discuss it—said that she would talk about it later. That did not suit Janet. She said that the matter would have to be settled immediately or Steele would look elsewhere. Then Mother told Janet that, if the matter had to be discussed, we must go over to Trevor's place; she would not have her guests upset by any more nonsense—it had been bad enough at dinner."

"Well, Mother started off to Trevor's and Janet flew out to my bunk-house, bursting in like a whirlwind and saying that I must get up at once and come to Trevor's as Mother had to be made to see reason." Ian paused.

"Oh, damn everything! Imagine sitting here spending my time talking about this when we may have only one more night together." He held her close, his mouth on hers, while she clung to him. At length Constance freed herself.

"Of course there is a great deal more, darling. You did not get me out of bed at this hour, if you did not have something very important to tell me."

"No—of course not. I told Janet to get out, that I wanted to sleep. By the way," he said, looking at the girl sharply, "where did you disappear tonight. I looked all over the place for you. When I asked Arthur where you had gone, he said that he had not the vaguest idea."

"I'll tell you later—you told Janet to get out?" she prompted.

"I said that I happened to know that Mother was not going to sell the Ranch and that I was behind her one hundred per cent.

" 'Isn't she?' cried Janet. 'That is all you know about it. I know that she has to sell the Ranch. We are going over to Trevor's right now to talk about it. Arthur is coming too. As far as I'm concerned you can sleep your fool head off.'

"With that she slammed out of the place and I jumped up and dressed, for I knew that, when Janet goes on the war path, she frightens the wits out of poor Mother and she will agree to anything.

"I dashed across to Trevor's place and the scene I broke in on was unique: Trevor's living room is an almost exact replica of an early Victorian drawing room—yet a very beautiful room, which his mother had trundled all across Canada. It suits Trevor with his tall fair English good looks but it was an odd setting for the present gathering.

"Trevor was standing in front of the fire, a glass in his hand, his tanned, handsome face a mask, but his knuckles about the glass were white and I knew that he was ready for any row we wanted to stage. He has taken a lot from Janet and Arthur since he has been insisting on economy and making them do with less money and I knew that he was just about fed up with it.

"Janet was sitting upright in a red chair by the fire, wearing the green dress she had on at dinner. She had assumed that regal air she adopts when she has made up her mind that she is going to have her own way. Those green eyes of hers were gleaming like a cougar's. Arthur had his dressing gown on and was sitting in a big chair, playing nervously with the tassel of it. I was startled at his resemblance to Father. He does look like Father, you know, but as Father would have looked, if a sponge had been passed over his face, wiping off all the strength and determination on it."

"And your Mother?" broke in Constance.

Ian laughed softly. "My dear, I stopped in amazement. Trevor has a yellow couch on the wall opposite the fireplace. Mother was crouched in the corner of it, wrapped in a long fringed cape that she has had for years and often wears about the place. She had been getting ready for bed when Janet had gone to her and her hair was hanging in two black braids over her shoulders. Can you picture her?"

Constance nodded smiling. "I certainly can. Ian, you don't mind do you? I think Janet does."

"Me? Lord, no. I am proud of it. Mother's grandfather

was a great Chief. But you are right about Janet. She and Arthur were upset, I could see that. She looked like a full-blooded squaw, and a mighty handsome one. I think she shows more of her mother's race as she gets older."

"And you, darling—you were golden and beautiful in the beautiful room," said Constance, conscious of how fatuous it sounded yet unable to withhold it.

Ian laughed with delight. "This beautiful, golden creature, as you picture him, was in blue jeans, high boots, a green plaid shirt and that jacket you are wearing. We were a mixed crowd in that lovely old-fashioned room and I wondered how such a group could ever come to an agreement on any subject under the sun.

"As soon as I entered Janet said, 'Well, what are we waiting for? Personally, I cannot see the necessity for all of us trooping over here to discuss a matter that does not concern Trevor at all. Moreover, what is there to discuss? Mother has had an offer for the Ranch. She has to sell because she needs the money. We all know that. It is a chance in a thousand, considering that we are in the Valley. If our land were up North, we could fool around with offers, but not down here.'

"Then Mother spoke up but I could see that it was taking all her courage. 'I am not going to sell the ranch, Janet. I have made up my mind.' Trevor poured a drink and, handing it to her, sat down beside her.

"Then Arthur broke in. 'Not sell? Don't be absurd! What on earth will you do if you don't sell—what shall we all do? You know you couldn't keep on the town house. What are we going to live on?'

"Then I spoke up. 'We can give up the town house. We don't need it.'

" 'Don't need the town house?' Janet cried. 'Don't be an idiot. Just because you are willing to stagnate out here, don't think that the rest of us are. I suppose you imagine poor Mother could bury herself out here.'

" 'Of course she can live out here,' broke in Trevor furiously. 'In fact, that is just what she is going to do. You may as well

hear it now as later. Margot and I are going to be married and live right here in this house. And your Mother is not going to sell this Ranch.'

"Then hell broke loose. I could see Mother flinch and her face was grey. I thought for a moment that Janet was going to throw her drink at Trevor. She paced up and down the room, raging at Trevor, at Mother, at me. Arthur began to yell at Mother, babbling about some damned horse—as if he had ever been a horseman. I have never seen him furious like that. Poor Mother seemed to grow smaller and smaller as she pressed against Trevor. He sat, with his arm about her, letting the storm rage.

"Finally, I had had enough. Like the perfect gentleman I am, I yelled at them to shut up. Then they turned on me. I had talked Mother into this; I was the only one to benefit. I was sacrificing my Mother to indulge my mad whim for farming.

"Trevor jumped up at last and, roaring above the tumult, told them to stop talking nonsense. They had heard what Mother was going to do and they would have to accept it. Arthur slumped down in his chair, mumbling about that horse again. Janet sat down and became cold and quiet. She is most dangerous then.

" 'Perhaps you don't realize, Mother,' she said icily, 'that you will lose your city property for taxes, if they are not paid soon.'

"Mother spoke quietly and wearily,—'Yes, Janet, I know that. Jack Steele told me, as I have no doubt he has told you.'

" 'And you mean to say that you are going to let everything go in order to keep the Ranch? You must be crazy. How do you suppose that the Ranch could keep us? It never has.'

"Then, of course, I jumped in just as things were getting a bit quiet. I said that anyone who thought that they could come out of a deal with a crook like Jack Steele and have money in his pocket was the mad one and that, if Janet imagined for a minute that Jack Steele was doing anything but using her, she was a fool."

Ian paused in his long narrative and shook his head dolefully. "I guess that did it," he sighed. "Janet turned to Mother and said in that cold clipped voice of hers that apparently Jack Steele was more to be relied on than her own family. She went on to say that she was determined to get away from here, that she had wasted enough years of her life and, if Mother could not finance it, she knew that Jack Steele would be only too glad to take her out of it—and that was all *I* knew about it.

"Mother cried out in horror. 'Jenny, Jenny dear—you would never do such a thing!'

"Janet looked at her coldly. 'It's all very well for you. You have lived your life. Now you are willing to make a laughing stock of yourself by marrying at your age and vegetating out here. That is not good enough for me, Mother. I'm going to Europe and Jack will take me. There is no use blaming me for my decision; it is all your fault.'

" 'You could find a job,' snapped Trevor.

"She looked at him with disdain. 'Of course, Trevor. I think that it would make you very happy to see me selling gloves behind a counter. You would have no worries then, married to your beloved ranch.'

" 'Janet, I will not have you saying such things,' Mother protested.

" 'Because you hate to hear the truth,' snapped Janet.

"Trevor jumped up and I thought that he would slap her. Then Arthur had his inevitable heart attack. I had been waiting for it. Well, that did it. Mother rose, so weary and so little.

" 'I'm sorry, Trevor. When we talked about this it all seemed possible but you see how it is,' she said quietly. 'We must go to bed now. All of us are tired and upset. I shall talk to you in the morning, Janet. Ian, please help Arthur to bed. These attacks worry me. Certainly, he is not strong enough to earn his living, whether Janet is or not. You must be very disappointed in me Trevor—I seem to have caused you nothing but trouble and unhappiness all my life. Well, will you take me home now?'

"Poor Mother—her defences had crumbled. Janet and Arthur have won again. My heart ached for Trevor."

Ian finished his long recital and they sat in silence, listening to the water rippling over the stones. Then Constance stirred in the man's arms. The full significance of what he told her struck her for the first time.

"But Ian darling, what about you?"

He looked down at her, smiling sadly.

"That, my dear, is why I have told you this story in such detail. It is not 'what about me' but what about us. We can't be married, Constance."

The girl sat up, her heart pounding.

"Don't say it Ian," she cried. "Don't even think of it. There must be some way."

The man caught her in his arms, pressing his lips against her soft throat.

"I have been trying to think of a way out for the last hour but it is hopeless. I had to talk to you tonight before you had a chance to speak to Sir Brooke or Lady Denton. Don't you see, darling, that, without the Ranch, I have absolutely nothing to offer a wife? How could I let you marry me and give up everything? Why, sweetheart, I won't even have a job."

"But you can get one, Ian. I shall be willing to do without things; I won't mind."

"You think now that you wouldn't mind but nothing is harder on a woman than the monotony of the drab, penny-pinching kind of living; that is all I could offer you. I suppose that I can get something to do. I have my degree in Agriculture and I could find something in either the Provincial or Federal Departments of Agriculture; but the salary would be a bare living for these days. The Government pays niggardly salaries to its technical men. One would think that they wanted their trained men to go to the States. We are one of the finished products—finished at great cost to the Government—that it exports at no charge to our neighbour."

Constance shivered and moved closer into the shelter of Ian's arms.

"Tonight, Ian, I stood at the window of my room and thought of what our life together on the ranch could be. I asked myself if I could adjust myself to it and help you make it a full and good life. I am not young. I am mature enough to think of all the facts that would enter into our marriage and I was convinced that our love for each other would take us over the hard places. Now the picture I had has changed but my conviction has not."

Ian sighed. "It is so good to hear you say that, Constance. I don't need to tell you how I feel about you. That is something we have both known about each other from the first minute we met. But don't you see, dear, that I would not be the same man away from the Ranch? To be cooped up in some laboratory or office—to live in a mean little house in a mean little street—would be the death of the real me. Nothing as wonderful as our love is going to be allowed to turn into something drab. Moreover, no matter what you think, that is not the kind of sacrifice I would allow you to make. Out here—yes—that was different. Here I could offer you something that was big and free and beautiful in place of what you were giving up. But, when I have nothing but a petty mean way of life for you, I can't do it."

After a moment or two, Ian spoke again.

"Now you see why I had to talk to you tonight, darling? It will be better that you go back with Sir Brooke and Lady Denton, free of any promises or sense of loyalty to me."

Constance knew what this last sentence had cost Ian to utter but she was shocked by what it implied.

"You forgot one thing," she said indignantly. "And that is that I love you, Ian—and no one else. Because of that I am leaving Sir Brooke and Gwen as soon as possible."

"But what will you do, darling?"

Suddenly Constance chuckled. "I'll try to make you marry me. As for Brooke and Gwen, I have already told Brooke that we love each other. After I left Arthur we went for a walk and I told him then."

"Oh!" cried Ian, troubled and pleased. "That is what I

wanted to save you. Did you tell him that you were leaving them at the Coast and coming back here?"

Constance nodded, unable to speak.

"My poor darling!" His voice broke and they were in each other's arms. He could taste the salt of her tears as he kissed her eyes. At length Constance spoke with decision.

"You have made up your mind, Ian. I know that. You will not marry me, if the Ranch is sold. I am going to do something about this but I don't know yet what it will be. But we love each other and we are going to have each other —for all the rest of our days."

Ian smiled sadly.

"I am afraid not, my dear. You will go back to England and forget all this in time. You may even be glad that it turned out as it did. It will seem like a mad, romantic interlude, a dream."

"Will it seem like that to you, Ian?"

"Ah, no, my dear one. I am the one who stays behind, whose life will be empty because the dream did not come true. This is where the dream was."

They rose stiffly, suddenly aware that they were chilled to the bone. In silence they made their way up the path. Ian kissed Constance swiftly, then, lifting her through the window, he fitted in the screen and was gone.

Without turning on the light, Constance undressed and got into bed. She lay, sleepless and unhappy, for there had been a finality to Ian's words, even to his last swift kiss. At length she decided that there was only one hope. She must appeal to Gwen—to whom everyone turned when in trouble. Heartsick and ashamed, she lay listening to the wind of dawn tearing across the land.

Chapter Eleven

CONSTANCE awoke late, and dressed hurriedly. It was a Ranch custom that everyone met at the breakfast table, and consumed huge quantities of Wong's superlative pancakes with maple syrup as well as other hearty Ranch fare. When she entered the dining room she was surprised to find that only Annie was there waiting to serve her.

"I'm sorry, Annie," she apologized, "I overslept. I suppose that everyone has had breakfast?"

Annie's pleasant smile was missing. She looked sad and discouraged.

"I'm afraid that I am a great nuisance," went on Constance, contritely. "I am sure that you have many other things to do. Let me wait on myself."

"It is all right, Miss Howard, I am glad to do it. There has been nobody but you and Lady Denton. Wong is furious. Lady MacKenzie is having her breakfast in bed, but she will be down for lunch. She has a headache. Lady Denton has eaten, and taken the dogs for a walk. Sir Brooke went out early for a ride, after a cup of coffee, and has not returned. Mr. Trevor and Mr. Ian did not eat over here. They have gone to a calf sale at the village. That Miss Janet and Mr. Arthur have not shown up either, and they should be ashamed of themselves. They know that their Mother likes them to behave like Christians when they are at the Ranch, and eat a proper meal at the table."

Constance laughed. "Well, that accounts for everyone but Mr. Steele."

Annie laughed her cackling laugh, her face creasing into a hundred wrinkles.

"Oh, he was in, right enough, but Wong does not like him, so he would only give him fruit juice, an egg and a cup of coffee in the kitchen. When I scolded him for it, he said that the man was too fat, and there wasn't a thing that I could do about it. Then poor Mr. Steele stalked off, to see if he could find some oil on the place, I suppose," she sniggered. "That is what has got under Wong's skin. He says that Mr. Steele was out the other day with some man from the States looking for the stuff."

"Do you think that he will find it?" asked Constance, attacking her grapefruit.

"If he does, he had better keep out of Wong's way. You would think, to hear that Chinaman talk, that he owned the place. He says that he is not going to have any stinking oil wells here. That is because Mr. Ian has told him he doesn't want the place sold. Wong will starve you to death if he doesn't like you, but if he has taken a fancy to you, it is just as bad, for he almost kills you by making you overeat. Now, that poor Lady Denton positively staggered out of this room. He insisted on waiting on her himself, says that she is too thin, and that she has starved in England. Told me that I was to look after Lady MacKenzie. He stood over her, and she is so kind that she waded through everything, with Wong hovering about, grinning like a chimpanzee. No wonder she had to go for a walk."

The maid removed Constance's plate, and came in staggering under a tray, loaded with dishes. She placed them before the girl. "Well, here you are," she grinned. "And you will break the poor old thing's heart if you don't eat every smidgin of it."

Constance looked in consternation at the dishes before her. "Not all this, Annie!" she cried aghast.

"Lady Denton did it," she challenged. "You should be proud. There is a saying around here that if Wong doesn't

like you, you don't come back, and we'd all be sorry for that, Miss Howard for we all say that you seem to fit in right nicely here."

The girl smiled. Annie, like Wong, was evidently a privileged person.

"I think that you must have been talking to Clem and Slim, Annie. They are the only ones I know about the place, other than our own party."

"Indeed, and I have been doing just that, Miss Howard, and they say that you are a good rider too."

"I am sorry that Lady MacKenzie is not feeling well," she said as Annie poured rich country cream and coffee into a cup.

The old woman's face sobered. "She will be all right in a few hours," she said shortly. "Now, is there anything else?"

Constance laughed, and assured her that there was nothing more that she needed, and Annie left the room. Constance, struggling with a breakfast that a cowboy would have considered ample, wondered about Lady MacKenzie. Annie, while evidently distressed about her, was not worried about health. She remembered a little by-play in the Big Room, when she had held out her glass, and Trevor, and Ian had seen to it that another drink was not forthcoming.

Poor Lady MacKenzie, thought Constance. Torn between the conflicting needs of her children, wanting rest, and surcease from the storm that was whirling through this difficult family. Ian was the best of them. He must not be sacrificed. She would hurry through her breakfast, and find Gwen. It was a heaven-sent opportunity to talk to her.

She attacked the dishes before her, and for Wong's sake, did her best, then rose, and putting on a coat, went out. As she passed through the gate, she heard a dog barking in the direction of the coulée, and followed the path down to it. She saw Gwen at the foot of the hill, throwing sticks to the dogs. Constance paused, unobserved, and watched the woman. She looked strangely content. The drive had gone from her face. It was as if, for the first time in years, she had relinquished the task of arranging the lives of others, and was satisfied to

be here alone, in the sweet autumn sunshine, and to be just Gwen.

The girl called, and she looked up, waving her arm, then went and sat on the sloping hillside. Constance joined her. They sat in silence for a few moments.

"It's heavenly here, isn't it?" said Gwen finally. "I know exactly what a tea bag feels like, steeping in hot water, just as I am steeping in this warm sun. It was great luck, having these wonderful days here. I don't wonder that you think of staying, Constance. If I were younger, I should be tempted to do so myself. It will be quite an adventure, this making a new life."

"I can't picture you living here, Gwen," cried Constance. "With your family and training, your brains and ability, life on a western ranch would not have given you enough scope, and as you said yourself, one pictures you against a background of clipped lawns and hedges. You have to be at the heart of things. You are one of the members of the privileged class who recognizes his responsibilities, and you have always lived up to them. If there had been more like you, you would not be struggling for your very existence now."

"And it is a struggle," sighed Gwen, thinking of taxes. "Constance, I know that you are somewhat radical, deep down in your heart, but have I been completely wrong in my convictions? As the world trend is today, apparently I have been. And yet, you know, and I am sure that it would be impossible to convince the average person of this, my convictions were not induced by selfishness. I suppose that it seems comic to you, but I sincerely believed that people like my family were the ones who knew what was best for our country and our countrymen. Perhaps that is what is at the root of my failure. I knew what was best for everyone, and was determined that they would be guided by me, and my kind. Now, I fear that I am an anachronism."

"Not you, Gwen," said Constance. "I think that you have been in your right place. I cannot think of you in any other, and that is why you have made such a good job of most of

the matters that you have concerned yourself with. I was talking to Arthur last night. He is a strange pitiful man. By the way, he has painted quite a remarkable picture. He talked of the importance of people being in their right places. If they could not find that place, they were lost."

"I agree with Arthur," said Gwen, wrinkling her eyes and looking down the sun-filled coulée. "I expect that my trouble is that I am always so sure that I know what the other person's right place should be also. And do you think that your right place is in Alberta, Constance? I don't want you to make a mistake. This is an important decision that you are making. I have thought a great deal of what you said yesterday morning. I won't deny that when you told me that you had decided to stay in Alberta I was glad. Odd," she said softly, her gaze still in the distance. "A few days ago I could not have said that to you. I think that you should reconsider. For some reason, none of us is quite normal; to use an expression, we all seem ready to go off the deep end."

Constance turned to the woman. "Gwen, it is about my staying that I have come to talk to you this morning. I have no right to ask this of you, and before we say anything more, I want to tell you how grateful I am for the years of kindness that you have given me, which I accepted so unthinkingly, and which I so little deserved."

Gwen put out her hand and laid it over the girl's. "My dear, I never blamed you. Of course I have known all these past years. I loved Brooke, and when you love, you know. Few young girls could have resisted Brooke, if he fell in love with them and at the time you were very young. No, Constance, as far as I was concerned, it had nothing to do with you. It was a matter between my husband and myself. Perhaps I should have let him go. All of us might have been happier had I done so, but he was my creation, and I was proud of him."

Constance stirred, her indignation showing in her face.

"No, wait, my dear, until I explain. I met Brooke, and fell in love with him. I hated to see him wasting his great gifts on what I thought was a wicked and lost cause. There

is much, as you know, of the maternal in my love for Brooke, because I am older than he is. I thought that I must rescue him from a great danger to his obviously brilliant future, and I did it in the only way I knew how, by marrying him. Our friend Arthur is wiser than I thought he was. I took Brooke out of his right place. He might have been Prime Minister by now, if I had not interfered. If a man is misplaced, he is always seeking to resolve the conflict within himself.

"When we get back to England, I shall no longer stand in his way. I owe him that, belated as it is. He cannot join the Labour Party again. One does not leave a party, battle against it and then rejoin it when it is victorious. But in all other ways, Constance, Brooke is to live his life as he wants to live it. That is why I say to you, 'Are you sure that you want to stay in Alberta?' "

The two women sat in silence in the sunshine. A cock pheasant came out from a clump of poplars and wolf willows behind them and strutted across the path, his colours shimmering in the bright light. Making a desperate effort to control her voice, Constance turned to Gwen.

"Ian and I love each other," she said simply.

"Ah!" Gwen snapped a twig that she had been fiddling with and threw it away. She had no words for her companion. All her thoughts were of Brooke, and a great pity for him swept through her as she looked at the beautiful woman beside her, whom her husband loved.

At length she forced herself to speak.

"That leaves me little that I can do for Brooke, to make amends. Yes, of course you will be staying over here."

Constance shook her head. "It is not as simple as that, Gwen. Little as I deserve it, I need your help."

She told the story of the night before, of Ian coming for her, of their long talk, and of the death of his hopes. Lady Denton sat quietly through the long recital, but when Constance spoke of Lady MacKenzie and the capitulation, as Ian saw it, to Janet and Arthur she sat up.

"No!" she burst out vehemently. "I will not have that. Here am I, breaking my vow that I shall not again interfere

in other people's lives. I am glad that you came to me, Constance. Margot MacKenzie is not to be hurt again. I have become very fond of her. She is my friend, and I have so few.

"Last night, as we were going to our rooms, she asked me to visit with her awhile in hers. We sat in front of the fire and talked for more than an hour. Annie brought us coffee and cold pheasant and toast—the quantities of food I have eaten here—clucking about us like an old mother hen. That Chinaman, the cook, kept peeking in at the door every time it was opened and grinning, pleased as a child that we were enjoying it. It is amazing how those two servants adore her. She says that Wong has been at the Ranch ever since she can remember, and that she has no idea how old he is.

"When Annie left us alone and the door had finally closed on Wong, she turned to me and said, 'Gwen, do you think that I'd look like an utter fool if I married Trevor Holland?'

"She snuggled back in her big chair, those odd eyes of hers smiling, and said, without the slightest trace of embarrassment, that she thought it would be cosy to sleep with someone again." Gwen chuckled. "I suppose that people talk like that to each other, but they never have to me, and I love it. She is an amazing person. The things which she has said to me. It is like getting a series of electric shocks. Emotionally, she is very simple, with a strong maternal complex, which has developed as she has grown older, but I am surprised to find that she is very well read, and much better informed than her daughter, who can talk so scintillatingly. She says exactly what she thinks, and being a unified person, impresses one with a sense of fundamental truths. Most people's minds are made up of bits and pieces, that are always bumping into each other—education, experience, background, one's own convictions. One part believes one thing, another something else. There is no unity. They speak what they think is the truth at one time, but we are not convinced, because we know that another segment of their minds thinks something else. Not Margot MacKenzie. She is all of a piece."

"Perhaps she is a primitive," suggested Constance. "I think Ian is. There is a simplicity about him that is very endearing."

Lady Denton agreed. "Margot told me many things about her life. I think that she has never had a friend in whom she could confide before, and the fact that I shall soon be far away made it easier for her. Margot's life has not been an easy one, and when she had finished talking I urged her to marry this Trevor. She is tired out with living; she is depressed and lonely. I think that Mr. Holland is a fine man, and that he will make her interested in life once more. She confessed that she had been drinking more than she should lately, from a sense of sheer futility and weariness."

"I rather thought that was so," agreed Constance. "I think that it was worrying Annie this morning. I suppose that after the scene they had over at Trevor's house last night she craved nothing but forgetfulness for a time."

"I am afraid so," nodded Gwen. "Well, as I said, I urged her to marry the man. We were quite like girls after that, planning that she and Mr. Holland would come to us for their honeymoon. She was so pleased when I suggested that. Of course, the whole plan depended on her keeping the Ranch. They will have to live out here. As I left her room I met Janet going to it."

"And that is what ruined everything," sighed Constance.

Gwen sat up straight, a frown between her eyes, as she braided some long grasses. "But I am not going to allow her plans to be ruined," she said decisively. "I shall have to take steps."

Constance laughed. "Oh, Gwen, then everything will be splendid. You know that we always say that when you take steps, you get your way."

"I know," she said, looking down and brushing the grass from her skirt. "Unhappily my old zest for arranging people's lives has left me. This is going to be very awkward for me, Constance."

"I know," the girl said contritely. "I forgot, for the moment. You are so generous, Gwen, that one is apt to take

your generosity as a matter of course." It would indeed be awkward for Gwen to interfere. She would be trying to use her influence to shatter Brooke's dream of making money in oil, and to make the marriage of Ian and Constance possible. Brooke might come to hate her for it.

"Constance, have you told Brooke about Ian?" Gwen asked presently.

Constance nodded, gently scratching one of the dogs behind his ears to hide her embarrassment. "I told him last night."

"Yes, I saw you leaving for a walk," said Gwen.

So she had seen them. How many times in the past had she seen them slipping out when they thought that they were unobserved? How many times had she hidden the ache in her heart by her natural kindliness, her innate good-breeding? And how many times had Constance stifled her guilty conscience by trying to persuade herself that Gwen did not love Brooke, did not "understand" him, until custom had dulled her sense of guilt, and she came to believe that love was its own justification?

Gwen was speaking. "Are you staying on here, if I can persuade Margot to keep the Ranch, or will you be coming back to England with us?"

"I planned to leave you at Vancouver. That will save money, and we shall need every cent that we have for Ian's plans for the Ranch. That is, of course, if that is satisfactory to you and Brooke. Brooke still has a heavy programme of speeches ahead of him. By the way, I think that I should mention that he is interested in this oil scheme of Mr. Steele's. Even if he cannot get money from England to buy stock, I think that Mr. Steele would give him a block in order to have his name on the directorate. Ian says that he is a crook."

"Why is he so anxious to buy this Ranch? One would expect him to be interested in the new oil fields."

"George, the chauffeur, who, it seems, knows everything, told Trevor that Mr. Steele is offering Lady MacKenzie only a small cash payment, the balance to be paid with a large block of stock. He has not enough money to handle any-

thing up north. When the stock is put on the market Lady MacKenzie can sell it and thus get her money. One thing that worries Ian is that he does not think that there is oil here. He is afraid that Mr. Steele will make a feeble effort to drill, something will go wrong with the well, and by that time the stock will have been sold."

Gwen shook her head. "Our new friends have amazing servants. How on earth did George find out all about this?"

Constance chuckled. "Ian said, quite seriously and apparently saw nothing odd about it, that George eavesdrops all the time, but no one objects, because he does it for the good of the family. He even buys Lady MacKenzie's liquor for her, and Ian and Trevor know all about that, and approve, because they know that George will do all he can to keep the supply limited. Janet dislikes having him around, and Jack Steele has offered him a job, and George thinks that he will have to take it, because he knows that Lady MacKenzie cannot afford to keep him. Apparently the family is almost at the end of its financial resources, and that is why almost any kind of offer appeals to Lady MacKenzie. Ian and Trevor both think that if she will only wait for a short time that they can put the Ranch on a paying basis. But, of course, that does not appeal to Arthur or Janet, because they could never make enough out of it to keep up the town place as they do now."

Gwen Denton shook her head and smiled. "Really, I think that they are all a bit mad. But, Constance, if this worthless stock is to be sold, what about the buyers? What about Brooke. He will lose his money if he puts any cash into it."

"Ian does not think so," answered the girl. "Mr. Steele wants to use Brooke's name. He will make him a director and give him a block of stock. That is one reason that he wants this Ranch. One point in its favour is that it's next to the Double Circle, and the other is that he also wants to use Lady MacKenzie's name. Her husband was one of the important men of the Province, and his name is closely linked with its

history. Strange, isn't it, to think of a country whose history spans only two or three generations. George says that the company is to be called the MacKenzie Consolidated."

"But all the others, the small investors who will be impressed with the MacKenzie and Denton names, what of them?" cried Lady Denton, shocked.

Constance shrugged. "Their business, apparently, is to contribute their small savings to Jack Steele, Sir Brooke Denton and Lady MacKenzie. As I said, the man is a crook."

"Have you told Brooke of this?"

"I did not know all the facts when he spoke to me about getting into this business. I did, however, tell him that this man Steele was not to be trusted."

"Then surely," cried Gwen, aghast, "he would not consider having any business dealings with him."

"He asked me who had told me, and when I said it was Ian, he was not convinced. I have had no opportunity to say anything more. That is why I have had to tell you all this."

"Well, at least we need not worry about that phase of our troubles," said Gwen, rising briskly. She looked at her watch. "I think that Margot will be feeling better by now. I am going to look her up and talk to her before lunch. Come along." She whistled to the dogs and started up the path, Constance following her.

"I hope that you will succeed," she said dubiously, her recent optimism evaporating. "If anyone can persuade Lady MacKenzie, you can. Ian says that Janet and Arthur have always been her favourites; that she has always given in to them. Why, I can't imagine."

"On the contrary. The twins are her favourites. This giving away to the others all the time is likely a guilt complex. The twins were her darlings, and knowing that she tried to make it up to the others by over-indulgence."

When they entered the house there was still no sign of any of the others about. Constance turned into the Big Room and picked up a magazine, after she had watched Gwen's

determined figure walk down the hall in the direction of Lady MacKenzie's room. At her sharp knock Lady MacKenzie swung about in her chair, dread in her face.

"Who is there?"

"It is Gwen, Margot. May I come in? I want to talk to you about something rather important."

A gasp of relief came from the other woman. She opened the door, exclaiming, "Yes, yes, of course, my dear. I thought that it was Janet. I am really not strong enough to see Janet this morning. Annie has been keeping her at bay as best she can."

Gwen looked with pity on the ravaged face of her hostess. The hooded eyes were little more than black slits in her weary hopeless face. The liquor she had taken had etched deep wrinkles unseen at other times.

"How are you, my dear?" she asked gently. "Frankly, I think that you look like the wreck of the Hesperus."

Margot MacKenzie smiled wanly. "My headache has almost left me. Why on earth do I do this to myself? Let us go out on the balcony and sit in the sun. You are just in time. Annie is bringing me a pot of coffee."

They went through the door and settled themselves in wicker chairs, then Gwen, never one to beat about the bush, said abruptly:

"Now, Margot, I want you to tell me what all this nonsense about selling the Ranch means."

The other woman flinched. "Gwen, I don't think that I can bear to tell you. I had it all out with myself last night, and I have arrived at the decision that I must sell the place. There are so many factors that I seemed to overlook when I talked to you and Trevor." She sighed heavily. "Yes, I shall have to sell it."

"Why?"

Margot threw out her hands in a helpless gesture. "What else can I do? It is my fault that Janet and Arthur are not equipped to make a living for themselves. We need money. This is the only way I can get it."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Gwen sharply. "If you make up your mind to live out here on the Ranch, I am quite sure that between Ian and Mr. Trevor, and the little that you have left, there will be enough money to do so modestly. I have come to tell you of a number of reasons why you must not sell the Ranch."

Margot MacKenzie's face lit up with hope. "What reasons?" she asked eagerly.

Annie came out and placed the coffee on the table between them. When she had filled their cups and left, Gwen said, "I could really mention dozens. I shall take them in order. Nothing is smooth sailing in life. We have both lived long enough to know that. When we have a decision to make, that concerns others than ourselves, we must do the greatest good to the greatest number. It sounds very bromidic, but it is a good rule to follow.

"Now, what about Mr. Holland? You told me last night that you were going to marry him and live out here in his house."

A book dropped in the bedroom and there was a gasp.

"Annie, get out!" cried Lady MacKenzie sharply, and there was a rustle and the soft closing of a door. Margot MacKenzie shook her head in annoyance.

"Really it is dreadful," she said. "I never have one minute of privacy. If it is not Janet and Arthur, who should both be in their own homes, bothering me about something, then it is George or Annie or Trevor hovering about. Ian, dear soul, is the only one who leaves me alone."

Gwen laughed. "Even Wong seems to do a great deal of fluttering about behind doors," she said. "But let us come back to our subject. We were speaking of Mr. Holland. Do you think that he will be content living in the city, or indeed any other place than this Ranch? You know that he would not."

Margot MacKenzie agreed. "Of course, we shall not get married now. Trevor realizes that. The success of our marriage depended on living out here. I realize that, too. Financially it will not make much difference to him. He has

some money of his own, and the salary that he has drawn as manager amounts to very little. I don't even know if he has been drawing his full salary"

"And what about Ian?"

A shadow fell across the woman's face. "Ian is strong. He can manage without my help. He has his profession."

Gwen's pince-nez swung rapidly from its black ribbon. "I doubt if he would be happy away from here," she said sharply. "He has great plans for improving the place, and thinks that he can soon get it on a paying basis. Moreover, he and Constance want to marry at once and live here. He says that he will not marry her if he has nothing better to offer than some Government work in the city. They are both heart-broken over your decision."

"Ian!" The dark little woman put her elbow on the arm of her chair and shaded her eyes with her hand. A tear appeared in the outer corner.

"Take some more coffee," urged Gwen. "You are looking better every moment." She poured another cup and put it in her friend's hand.

"I may look better," said Margot with a wry smile, "but I feel worse every minute. So Ian and Constance are in love with each other! What a beautiful couple they are. It would make me very happy to see Ian married to her." She sighed heavily.

Margot MacKenzie looked at her friend sharply. "We must contrive some way for Constance to marry Ian. It would be a very suitable match if Constance thinks that she could make such a very great change. The trouble is that Ian is very obstinate. If he imagines that he should not marry Constance and ask her to live very modestly in the city, he will not do it."

"And that is just the way he has decided," said Gwen, quickly. "It is a pity, for they are very much in love."

"Really," smiled Margot. "This has been a very strange gathering."

"Why do you say that?" asked the other curiously.

"Trevor was saying yesterday that we have all gone a bit mad the past few days. As children, when everyone seemed to be at sixes and sevens suddenly, and life began to go topsy-turvy, my father used to say that there was an Imp in the house."

Lady Denton looked up in amazement. "Things *are* strange, aren't they? Certainly there has been a great change in our little party. I suppose that things have been simmering for some time, but they have boiled over while we have been with you. Constance has fallen out of love and in again with the most startling rapidity. Brooke, who has long been settled in his romantic groove, has been shaken out of it and developed a great dissatisfaction with his whole way of life. As for me, I have come to doubt my whole philosophy. It seems to me that all I have worked for has been destroyed, but it does not matter, for it was worthless. Yet, heretofore, I have been sincerely convinced of its value."

"And Trevor and I, after all these years have decided to get married. Ian has fallen in love for the first time in his life, I am sure. Napier was the one who was always very much interested in girls. That leaves just Janet and poor Arthur, with their same old unhappiness and dissatisfaction."

"Constance says that Arthur has painted a remarkably good picture since he has been here, and Constance does know pictures. He says that it is the best thing that he has ever done, so perhaps the Imp is looking over his shoulder too. I think," she laughed, "that since, as we both believe in this Imp, that we shall have to make him work for us."

Lady MacKenzie laughed. She was already feeling better. Whether it was Annie's cold tart lemonade, the coffee or the lifting of the fog of hopelessness that had settled on her the night before, she did not know. What she did know, was the pleasure of sitting here, speaking intimately with another woman, as she had never done before. That was a tonic in itself.

"My dear," Gwen leaned forward and spoke gently, softening her words. "George says that this Mr. Steele is a crook,

as he expresses it. His idea, Trevor and Ian are convinced, is to foist worthless stock on an unsuspecting public in order to secure enough money to buy leases up North. They seem to think that the whole thing is a fraud. Mr. Steele is trying to interest Brooke in the scheme. I cannot have my husband's name mixed up in any such shady transaction, whether he makes money out of it or not, nor," she added slowly, "can I have my friend."

For all the gentleness of tone and manner, there was a veiled threat of withdrawal. Lady MacKenzie's heart sank within her. Must she lose Trevor, Ian, Constance, and now Gwen, that Janet and Arthur might be served?

Margot smiled sadly. "If George said it, it is so. How that big, rather clumsy man manages to hear everything that goes on, without being seen, I don't know. Sometimes I have suspected him of having an invisible cloak. He is the only deliberate eavesdropper I know who is not a sneak.

"But there may be oil here," she said hopefully. "We shall have to see a geologist's report."

Gwen shook her head. "You know that you do not trust the man yourself. You are taking this step because of Janet and Arthur."

Lady MacKenzie leaned back in her chair, looking small and distressed. She closed her eyes to hold back the tears. Lady Denton looked at her in pity.

"Margot, for my sake I want you to keep this Ranch. I would not say this, except that I think it is better for you as well. If you keep this Ranch, Ian will marry Constance. She told me that this morning. She will continue her journey with us as far as Vancouver and will then come back here, not returning to England. To be frank, I am a bit tired of Constance being in England. I think that with the girl in Canada, Brooke will be much happier, and become more settled. Of course he will suffer for a time, but I shall make things as easy for him as possible. I understand him better now, or at any rate, I understand myself better. I shall not interfere with him and his career. Politically, he can go his

own way. If Constance comes home with us, as I think she will if Ian is determined that he cannot marry her, she will turn to Brooke again, for beauty such as she has demands love. And Brooke, realizing how nearly he lost her, will go to any length to keep her. I have seen that situation very often. They will become another couple, stranded on the French coast. Brooke, missing all he has had of prestige, adulation, and the things that money can buy, will soon become a petulant old man. Constance will be bored to death, and I shall be a cranky old woman living in the country, with no one to mother."

Margot sat up and laughed. "You have played your last card, haven't you? You are indeed concerned about me, when you plead for yourself. But my dear, you don't know the meaning of selfishness, so you don't fool me."

Gwen smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Well, it was a good card, and I had to play it. What is the trouble, Margot? Let us forget all those very good reasons that I have given you, for not selling the Ranch, and discuss your reason for deciding to sell it. Why are you considering Arthur and Janet, at the cost of all the others? Is it a guilt complex? Brooke simply snorts when I talk of complexes, but of course one must consider them."

Lady MacKenzie's eyes widened. "Yes," she said slowly, "I think that you are right. They have inherited weaknesses, caused, as I think, by a mixture of two races. Napier and Ian were the fortunate ones. They are normal. When Gordon died, I blamed myself entirely. I had given him my mixed blood, in which alcohol is a poison and a madness, and I had not loved him enough. I vowed that to Janet and Arthur, as a memorial to Gordon, I suppose one might call it, I would sacrifice myself always for their well-being. It was too late to help them build better characters. I must work with the material I have. It is partly my fault that Arthur is lazy, and that Janet is a barbarian if she does not get her own way. And so," she threw out her hands in a gesture of futility, "what else can I do but make their way as easy as possible for them,

and keep Janet out of mischief?" She sighed heavily, and taking a cigarette out of the box, lit it with a shaking hand.

"But Margot," protested her friend. "You speak as if Janet has a weak character. I don't think that she has. If it were necessary, I am quite sure that she would manage to look after herself very well."

"If she hasn't a weak one, she at least has an odd one. She has little real passion, I am sure, yet she behaves like a nymphomaniac. She is happiest when she is hunting, fishing, riding, yet yearns all the time for the cities of Europe. She has a fierce family pride, yet is ashamed of my Indian grandfather, who was one of the greatest chiefs in western Canada. She keeps tearing herself apart, and suffers in the process."

"Odd that you should say that," smiled Gwen. "I was just telling Constance that you possess unity in a marked degree. A pity that Janet has not some of it."

"I certainly did not have it when I was younger, but I am acquiring it now, because I am becoming more Indian as I get older. In appearance, I certainly show my mother's race more than I did. It is strange. I imagine that I remember things which I could not possibly remember. It happens when I am waking from a heavy sleep, or just drifting off to sleep. I have vague half-dreams of a way of life that I have never really known. I was brought up as any average English girl at that time was brought up—a good home, a fine school in England, and as the world sees it, a successful marriage. It worries me."

"Nothing to worry about," said Gwen sensibly. "Marry Trevor and you will forget all this. Now, I want you to promise me one thing. See Mr. Steele, and tell him that you have made up your mind definitely, that you are not going to sell the Ranch."

The little woman on the other side of the fireplace shook her head. "It is not as easy as that. Jack Steele has practically told me that the city will seize my town property for taxes. That is the chief reason why I must have money. He can manage that. He is a man who can pull all sorts of wires. If we lose the town property, we shall have nothing but the

Ranch, and what little money Trevor has, and I am sure that that cannot be very much. I'd likely have a few thousand left over, but not nearly enough to take care of Janet and Arthur."

"There it is again," cried Gwen sharply. "By the way, what is wrong with Arthur, why must you be so concerned about him?"

"He is not strong, Gwen. He has never been able to work, and I have always been afraid to urge him to do anything, in case it would do him harm, although Ian and Napier always said that he was as well as any one. But they are wrong. Last night, he had another of his attacks. On top of that Janet said that she would go away with Jack Steele, unless I sold the place and gave her enough money to get away. She hates our small city, and thinks that she is wasting her life here. So you see, my dear, the problem is not a simple one."

"Will Mr. Steele marry her?"

Margot shook her head. "No, Janet may think he will, but I know that he will not. He is politically ambitious. In Canada the people like their politicians to be without spot or blemish, as far as their domestic affairs are concerned. A devoted wife is a great asset."

"What does Arthur want out of it?"

"He wants to go to Paris again." Suddenly Margot chuckled. "He came in and talked to me this morning for a minute or two. He has painted a horse, why a horse I can't imagine, for he hates the creatures, and so, for some reason beyond my comprehension, he must now go to Paris. I suppose that it is the same picture that he showed Constance."

Gwen was looking across the brown lawn, her eyes wrinkled up against the bright sun.

"There is Mr. Steele now. I suppose he is looking down the holes those amusing little gophers make, to see if he can find some oil. The more you say, I must confess, the more complicated the question becomes. We must get back to the fact that more people will benefit by your not selling the Ranch, than by your selling it."

She jumped up suddenly. "If Arthur wants to paint horses, he can stay out here and paint them. Goodness knows, there

are enough of them about the place. You are not protecting Janet at all. What that girl needs is work. I shall think of something for her. It is time that steps were taken. Now, I am going to ask Annie to bring you two nice collins, and I am going to send Mr. Steele to you. Over your drinks, you will tell him quite emphatically that you have decided to have nothing to do with this scheme of his. You are not to falter."

She turned at the door of the room and smiled. "I am quite sure that if you weaken and do not do as I say, that Annie or George will come and tell me. I shall post one near. And now, my dear, I must go and see about that poor husband of mine. He may have thrown himself, horse and all, over a cliff. Why on earth people allow their lives to get so mixed up I shall never know."

She was gone, and Lady MacKenzie looked after her in amazement. It did sound simple, the way she put it. She had only to say to Jack Steele, "No, I am not selling the Ranch," and the whole miserable business would be settled. After she had done that, she would take up the other problems. Was it possible that half the worry and upset in the whole sorry world today was caused by people deliberately muddling up issues, and then failing to find a way out. She looked across her broad acres, and thought that if she were strong and resolute for only a few minutes, she could say, "They are mine."

Annie came out to the porch with a tray. Her mistress looked almost greedily at the tall, frosted glasses, the ice in them tinkling like wind bells.

"Lady Denton asked me to bring these up," she said with a trace of disapproval in her voice. "How are you feeling now?"

"I feel wonderful, Annie. I feel as if I had been smothering in a lot of nonsense, and have just come up for air."

Annie softened. "It's a crying shame," she ejaculated, "You are always being smothered in a lot of nonsense." She stopped and lifted the coffee tray. "Lady Denton asked me if I would mend a glove for her. May I do it in your room? I didn't bring along my sewing box."

"Annie, you old fraud," laughed Lady MacKenzie. "I know all about the plot. By the way, do you think that George would stay on if we moved out to the Ranch. You know, of course, that he was thinking of leaving me. You might mention it to him when you see him, will you? I don't want him to make any definite arrangement with Mr. Steele until I have had a talk with him. He could move his mother and family out with him. We could fix up a couple of bunkhouses for living quarters. There are so few men on the place, that two could very easily be spared. Ian needs a man to help him on his end of the work."

Suddenly Annie's old face crinkled up, and she began to cry.

"Why, Annie!" cried her mistress aghast.

"I'm so happy," sniffled Annie. "You and Mr. Trevor, and that pretty English girl, and all. I'm that happy that I could bawl like a coyote. Our luck's changed, I just know it —from the minute these English people came into your house. Just you see, Lady MacKenzie. We'll win the chuck wagon race next year, you see if we don't. It's going to be like old times with the family from now on."

"Well, get along and mend your glove. You are a silly old woman, Annie, but I am glad that you are happy enough to cry. Mr. Steele is coming in a minute, and I don't want him to see you crying all over the place."

"I know he's coming," said Annie smugly. "And I am telling you straight, that if that man doesn't get his walking ticket, I'll go straight to Lady Denton and tell her. As I said, she has changed our luck."

"Then she is the Imp," smiled her mistress. "And perhaps she is at that."

"Land's sake!" cried Annie indignantly. "You and your heathen talk about Imps. She is a great lady. Why, George says—."

"Oh, go along with you," laughed Lady MacKenzie, "sometime, I don't know when or how, I am going to do something that you and George won't know anything about."

Annie left with the coffee tray, and Lady MacKenzie sat very still. "I must not think," she said to herself. "I must draw a shutter down on all my thought of Janet and Arthur, and finances. Thank heaven, all my life I have been able to pull down that shutter for there are times when I think that I should have gone mad. I shall say—'I have thought the matter over very carefully, Mr. Steele, and I am not interested in your proposition.' I'll just keep repeating that over and over until he leaves. It is really very simple."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Lady MacKenzie. "I am sitting on the porch," Annie had, apparently, hidden herself in the bathroom for the moment.

Jack Steele came bouncing in, exuding shaving lotion and a vitality that made the little, tired woman on the verandah ache. He paused at the door leading onto the porch.

"Ah, good morning," he smiled, surveying the tray with the drinks, the empty wicker chair. "This looks very comfortable. On a sunny morning, there is nothing like a verandah, shaded by green awnings, some comfortable chairs, and a refreshing drink. Lady Denton said that you wanted to see me."

"Good morning, Jack. I hear that you were one of the few who appeared at breakfast this morning, and I appreciate it, especially since I myself broke my hard and fast rule. It is something that my father, and then my husband always insisted on when we were at the Ranch. This morning was our first departure from it, and the MacKenzies were the guilty ones. Wong and Annie were very upset. They dislike any departures from tradition out here."

She told herself that she was talking too much, and knew that it was because she was frightened, frightened for Arthur and Janet, frightened because she knew that her will was weak where those two were concerned. Her practised ear heard Annie slip into the room, and it was is if Lady Denton herself were there. It gave her courage.

"What is the use of a drink and an easy chair, if you do not enjoy them," she said.

The man sat down, and raised his glass. "Well, here's luck! I think that our venture is going to be successful."

He put his glass down on the table, and leaned towards the woman, a cigarette hanging loosely between his fingers. "I was talking to Dick Watson over the 'phone this morning. He is very enthusiastic. That man knows the oil game from the ground up, and he thinks there are great possibilities here."

He leaned back, crossing his heavy legs, a satisfied smile on his fresh, pink face. "I have been talking to Sir Brooke Denton also. I am sure that he will come in with us. It will count for a great deal to have a man of his reputation on our board of directors. Yes, everything is shaping up very nicely. Then, of course, the fact that they are drilling on the Double Circle means something. A company like that would not take over the place unless they expect to find oil."

Margot MacKenzie sat silent before the spellbinder. What the man was saying sounded sensible. True, a Company had spent millions before they had discovered the Leduc field. She knew that the percentage of dry holes was fairly large, but then again, other people had made millions out of the oil in Alberta. All her doubts assailed her again. If the venture was a success she could give Ian enough money to buy other land, he would not have to worry over lack of equipment, and she could buy Arthur and Janet a measure of contentment.

She heard a scratching sound, and looked over the railing of the verandah. George was on his hands and knees cleaning dry leaves from the hedge near them. What an organizer that Gwen Denton was! No wonder her husband had achieved cabinet rank. She smiled, and Jack Steele's gaze followed her eyes, and he frowned. Lady MacKenzie sat up, with a new energy, and drained her glass, then setting it down on the table with deliberation said, "Jack, I am not going to sell this place. I have given the matter serious thought, and my decision is irrevocable."

"What!" barked the man.

"I am not going to sell the Ranch, the lease, anything. Suppose that they do not find oil on the Double Circle, then where would we be?"

"Is that what is worrying you?" said the man with relief. "Don't worry, Lady MacKenzie, we shall unload our stock before that well is abandoned, if that seems to be necessary."

"No. I could not be party to any such game as that. I have seen such things happen in the old days, I know all the tricks to make money in this business, both honest and dishonest. I can not take the risk. Perhaps there is oil here, and I am missing a chance to make a fortune, but I would advise you to place your interests in the new fields, for, as I said, I am not selling."

Jack Steele's marble-like eyes turned hard as glass. As he reached for another cigarette, fumbled in his pocket for his lighter, she saw the little flame tremble. "This is more important to him that I had dreamed," she thought. "I had imagined that it was just another or his many schemes. I wonder what game he was playing with the MacKenzies."

The man took a long breath. "I wonder if you realize just what you are giving up, Lady MacKenzie?" he said finally. "I am willing to play more than square with you. I take a gamble that there is oil here. I do all the work of organizing; you share the profits. So, also, do your friends, Sir Brooke and Lady Denton, and, if I may remind you, your children."

"Jack," reiterated the woman, "I am not going into this venture." She could almost hear Annie draw in her breath in the room behind her. George kept scraping away, making a great row, which, she knew, would make no difference at all. He and Annie would compare notes in a few minutes, and he would not have missed a word.

Jack Steele leaned back and slowly finished his drink. "I wonder if the members of your family agree with your decision, Lady MacKenzie? You are, if you will forgive me for pointing it out, taking on a great responsibility in depriving them of their birth right. By a lucky chance, you own the mineral rights on this land. It is in your power to give Arthur the chance to develop his talents, and get away from the aimless life which he is leading. As for Janet, she is stifled in this small mid-western city, which, as you know, she hates,

and for which she is unsuited, due to the years she spent abroad when she was younger."

Margot MacKenzie felt the danger creeping through her again. This man knew where she was most vulnerable. She broke in hastily. "Jack, I have made up my mind, as I said before. I am not going to sell the Ranch, the lease, not one blade of prairie grass, not one badger hole. Perhaps I am making a mistake. If I am it will only be one of many that I have made in my life. I realize all the problems I shall have to face, and which you have pointed out to me, but my answer to you is the same."

Jack rose abruptly, and looked down at the woman in front of him. "I don't think that I need remind you, Lady MacKenzie," he said softly, "That your financial situation is no secret to a great many people. What has caused you to change your mind, for I am quite sure that you were open to reason a few days ago, in fact last night, I don't know. That is your business. But this I feel I must say, in fairness to you. The city has been very patient in the matter of taxes, because the MacKenzies are old timers. That patience is not inexhaustible."

"I realize that," said Lady MacKenzie, with great dignity. "The city would be quite justified in confiscating my city property. Rent control put the finishing touch on what was already a bad situation. Be that as it may, I am *not* selling the Bar X."

The pink, smiling face of the man had turned red with anger, as he realized that he had played his last card, and lost. "Very well, Lady MacKenzie. If you change your mind, please let me know, but I must warn you that my offer holds good for a few days only. I shall say good-bye now, and thank you for a delightful visit. Will you tell Janet that I have to go back at once to the city. I have some business that needs my immediate attention?"

He nodded abruptly. The memory of her refusal to take his hand a few days before still rankled. He turned and strode through the room, longing to slam the door, like a

spoilt child. "The old bitch," he raged, "I'll get even with her if it's the last thing I do!"

When he had gone, Margot MacKenzie, closed her eyes, and leaned back in her chair, her heart pounding. George rose from his knees, and sauntered off. Annie came out to the porch, and picking up the tray with the glasses said, "If you don't need me, Lady MacKenzie, I'll take this glove to Lady Denton."

Margot smiled sadly to herself. "If I can't please my family, at least I have done well by my servants, and at that, I think that they are the more deserving."

Chapter Twelve

JACK STEELE, hurrying along the hall from Lady MacKenzie's room, met Janet, coming from the study.

"Jack," she cried. "Where on earth have you been? I have been looking all over the place for you."

"I went for a walk. I was just going to look you up. I am leaving before lunch, Janet."

Janet stared at him in amazement. "But darling, you can't do that. I have to talk to you. You must see mother. I fixed everything up last night. That is why I have been looking for you." She moved away. "I'll go now, and tell her that you want to talk to her," she said over her shoulder.

"Janet, wait!" cried the man.

She turned, and came towards him slowly, something in his voice stirring alarm in her. Her wide thin mouth was a straight scarlet line, in her long brown face. The nostrils of her small aquiline nose flared, and her green eyes blazed at him. If this man thought that he was going to back out now, she would hound him for the rest of his life. This was her chance, perhaps her last chance, of getting away, and starting life over again, and no one was going to interfere with her plans. If it was a choice between Jack Steele and London, she was choosing London.

"Well?" she asked. "What is the matter. You sound as if you were upset about something. Why don't you want to talk to mother?"

For a moment the man was so struck by her beauty, lit up by her anger, that he did not hear what she said. He shook his heavy shoulders. No Ranch, no Janet. She would only be a nuisance. But what a glorious creature she was!

Impatiently, Janet repeated her question.

"I've just seen your mother," said the man sullenly, "She won't sell."

"Won't sell? Don't be silly, Jack," said Janet impatiently. "Arthur and I fixed things last night. Now you have talked to her and messed everything up, and it will all have to be done over again. I told you to leave everything to me."

The man was hit by the accusation. Jack Steele mess up a deal?

"You are the one who is silly, my dear, if you think that your mother is going to sell the place, and don't imagine for one moment that I am the one who has made a mess of things. When I talked to your mother the other day, she was almost ready to sign on the dotted line. Why the devil didn't you and Arthur leave it for me to handle? But oh no. You two knew just what to do. If you put on the pressure a bit, you could swing it."

Janet was thunderstruck. "But what did mother say? What happened?"

"She sent word by Lady Denton that she wanted to talk to me. When I arrived, I couldn't get a damned thing out of her, but, 'No, I am not selling the Ranch.' Well it is all washed up now, and I am pulling out. I have to see Dick Watson in town at once."

There was a finality in his voice, and fear gripped Janet. Her eyes softened, and she moved seductively nearer to him and put her hand upon his arm.

"All right, darling, you run along to town, but don't do anything abut this until I see you. We are all going back tomorrow, and I shall get in touch with you, I'm going to see your etchings, remember?" she smiled.

She felt the man's arm tremble beneath her hand, and was reassured. She could handle her mother; Jack was the uncer-

tain quantity, but as long as he was in love with her, everything would be all right.

"Mother does not like you Jack, and she is just being cantankerous. I know that she has a bad headache this morning. You push off now, and I'll have a talk with her."

He seized her roughly, and caught her to him. She melted into his arms, her long, passionate kiss seeming to melt his very bones. The cook out in the men's quarters, struck the triangle, and its call to the mid-day meal, which was obeyed in the Ranch house as well, rang through the place, Janet pulled away.

"Darling, go now. Don't wait for lunch. The others will be coming to the Big Room for cocktails."

He tried to put his arms about her again, mad with desire for her, but she repulsed him quickly. "My dear, discretion above all else," she smiled. "I don't have to tell *you* about that," she whispered, smiling. "Go along now, and don't worry. Arthur and I can handle mother."

She left him and made her way to the Big Room. Constance was reading by the fire. Janet looked at her with new interest. So Ian had fallen in love with this girl. Well, she was very beautiful, if one liked that fair, English type. But what in the world did she see in Ian, that she could give up Sir Brooke and London for him? She concluded at once that Sir Brooke had lost interest. "I'll look them up when I get to London," she decided. "It may be a very interesting episode. And of course, they know all the best people."

She smiled warmly at the girl. "No one has come yet? I'll ring for George to bring the drinks." Just then George entered.

"Where is everyone, George?" she asked brightly. "The house has been like a morgue all morning. We should have arranged to go shooting or something."

"Ian and Mr. Holland went to a calf sale," said Constance. "I don't know where the others are."

"They are all back," said George. "Lady MacKenzie will be down immediately."

Just then Sir Brooke and Lady Denton came in, followed shortly by Lady MacKenzie.

"Are Ian and Trevor coming, George," she asked anxiously. "It is our last day together."

"Everyone will be here, Lady MacKenzie," said George, passing the glasses. "Ian and Mr. Holland came back from the sale about half an hour ago."

Arthur came in, then Ian and Trevor. Everyone started talking at once, with great animation, as people do, when they are conscious of deep undercurrents that cannot be discussed. Brooke came over and sat beside Constance on the chesterfield. Looking at his handsome profile, Constance's heart ached as she noted the lines on his face were more deeply etched. He turned and smiled at her, and a feeling of desolation filled her, so that she knew that she still loved him, that their years together would always be an important part of her life, but she realized that it was now a love without passion. For the first time, she was intensely aware of his age, of little mannerisms that had once charmed her, and now annoyed her, and she knew that her love for Ian had not caused this. It had been growing on her for weeks. Perhaps she had fallen in love with Ian so quickly, because she had been preparing herself for just such an experience.

Brooke began to talk to her of the Palomino horse, which he had been riding, of the exhilaration of riding over wide open country. Aware, as she knew they both were, of the other's nearness, almost able to read his thought, she eagerly kept the conversation going, and soon they were laughing about some ride they had shared in England, as Brooke reminded her of some amusing contretemps. Looking across the room, she caught Ian's eyes on her. They were dark and unsmiling, and his chin was thrust out.

"You're marrying a savage, my dear," murmured Brooke, and Ian, aware that he was looking like a fool, turned away, and devoted himself to talking to Lady Denton and his mother, furious with himself, yet hating Brooke for talking with Constance, when he would have her to himself soon, and Ian would have to face the years without her. He knew that

the girl thought his attitude towards their marriage was quixotic, but he could not help that. It was the way he felt about it. Brooke Denton was no mean rival. He would take him on any time, with the Ranch, and a totally new way of life to offer Constance, but he could not face asking her, or indeed allowing her to accept less, after the life Sir Brooke and Lady Denton had made possible for her.

Trevor, himself depressed at the way things had turned out at his place the night before, and worried about the future for Ian and Margot, was, nevertheless, determined that this little party, which had given Margot so much pleasure, was not going to be ruined the last day or so. The free and easy informality of the first day was missing. Everyone was making an effort to keep things going. Himself a temperate man, he plied each one with drinks, and saw to it that the conversation became general.

They began to enjoy themselves. Wong, hearing the laughter, could be seen hovering behind the open dining room door, across the hall. Annie, her face wreathed in smiles, fussed about the table. George, looking smug and solid in his white coat, kept the shaker filled. Lady MacKenzie looked at him, and thought that nothing changed his expression. By now, he knew that his fondest dream had come true. He would live at the Ranch, and his family and Mother would be with him, yet his face was as expressionless as ever. Gwen was looking excited and happy, although it meant little to her personally. As for herself, Margot's inner tension gave her a feeling of nausea, and she found it difficult to join in the conversation. Her eyes met those of George, as he came towards her, and he gave her a slow and surreptitious wink. His mistress chuckled, and immediately felt better. She had explained Jack Steele's unexpected absence by business, and was sure that no one, not even Janet regretted it.

When, finally, they were gathered about the luncheon table, the spirit of their first evening at the Ranch prevailed. Trevor suggested a picnic tea, for the afternoon, at the Prince of Wales Ranch. The men would take their guns. The drive home at sunset would be beautiful. Even Arthur was caught

up in the enthusiasm for the plan, and said that he would go. Each in his heart was troubled. Each said to himself that for the rest of this visit they would forget their problems. Later they would take them up again, but for today, in this high sun-drenched land, they would forget them. They would drive and walk through stubble fields, which lay like a golden carpet beneath the high blue sky. They would drink in the clear mountain air, heavy with the smell of ripe wheat. Pheasants would rise in lumbering flight, and coveys of Hungarian partridge would glide on rigid wings across the roads. They would drive home, good friends close together, through the cold, clear, opalescent evening, watching the giant flames of gas flares, hearing the lonely call of a coyote on a far hill, towards the great bulk of the deep blue Rockies against the high dome of the Alberta sky. They knew that later they would sit in the Big Room, listening to great music, while they looked out on a night, wild and beautiful with northern lights crackling across the sky, shaming the waning moon.

It was enough. By some strange chance this little group would find a few hours, out of thousands of years past and to come, a little speck of time, a consciousness of space, where they were content, and each knew that he would remember it always.

After lunch was over, Janet followed her mother to her room.

"Mother," she burst out excitedly. "Jack told me that you won't sell the Ranch. Whatever did you say to him to give him such an idea? You can't fool around with this offer forever, you know. There are other Ranches in the Valley. If they abandoned the well at the Double Circle the whole thing might fall through. We have to work fast."

Lady MacKenzie, putting on her tweed coat in front of the mirror turned to her daughter with that dignity that always intimidated her children when they became obstreperous.

"Jenny, dear, I am not discussing the question just now. I have set aside the rest of the day to enjoy myself."

"But Mother," expostulated Janet.

"There is no use saying anything more, Jenny. Tonight,

after our guests have gone to bed, the family will meet again at Trevor's. They will go to bed early, I imagine, after an afternoon in the open, and a heavy dinner—."

"Don't tell me that you have ordered another of those awful Ranch dinners," groaned her daughter. "Mother, do you realize who these people are?"

"Well, you have mentioned it often enough," said Lady MacKenzie, searching in a drawer for a red scarf. "Of course I am going to have another of those awful Ranch dinners. The lazy susan will be on the table, simply loaded with pickles and such like. Wong has an enormous roast of beef in the deep freeze that he has been keeping for a very special occasion, our own beef, and there is no better beef in the world. We are having soup, roast beef, two vegetables, *including turnips,* and a simple dessert. If that horrifies my daughter, it won't horrify my guests. They will love it. For one who fancies herself versed in the affairs of the world, you seem strangely ignorant of the fact that English people are either a bit hungry all of the time for meat, or eating it with a guilty conscience. No wonder the country is having such a time of it. Those people need good roast beef; they don't seem to be able to function well without it. The trouble with you, Jenny, is that you do not think of the pleasure you give people, but how you look giving that pleasure, and I assure you that there is a world of difference."

Janet shrugged. "All right, have it your own way. But why must we all trek over to Trevor's again tonight? I thought that we settled things last night."

"Why do we ever trek over to Trevor's?" grinned her mother. "Except to have a good family row. And now, my dear, I shall appreciate it so much if you will go down and help Annie and Wong pack the baskets. They are much too old to be left with everything to do."

Janet gasped. "Where is George?" she asked indignantly.

"He is putting gas in the cars," answered her mother, and walked out of the room leaving her daughter open-mouthed. She had not been in the Ranch kitchen since she was a child. Then she too left the room, to go and help Annie and Wong,

wondering for the first time in her life if it were possible that her mother would not give her daughter anything within her power that she demanded.

As they all stood about the cars a few minutes later, while George and Ian packed away the baskets and guns, Lady Denton took one look at Janet's set angry face, and contrived that Brooke drive with Janet in the small car, praying, for the first time in her life, that he would exert all his charm on a woman.

When they arrived at the picnic spot, Constance and Gwen found themselves walking towards the river together, where the fire was to be lit. Gwen paused and looked about her.

"I wish today would last for hours," she said. "It is peaceful and sunny, one of those good days, that come unexpectedly, and are never forgotten. You think that there is no reason why the next day cannot be just the same, but it never is."

"I was thinking the very same thing at lunch, when Mr. Holland suggested the picnic tea. It seemed to be just the right thing to do, and we were all in the mood for it."

"Well, I only hope the day ends well. I have lost all faith in my infallibility. I made a vow not to meddle in people's lives, and I have done it again. I think that I have done the right thing, but formerly, I would have had no doubts. The trouble is that once you meddle, you have to see the thing through, tie up the ends, and leave everything tidy. And once you have done that, they can never quite escape again. It is too much like playing God. As Arthur says, people should be in their right place, and who am I to decide what it is? I do not mean a geographical place, nor yet the work one is doing, the old square peg in a round hole, but a spiritual place, where you can do the work you are called on to do. All my life I have been making places for people, and expecting that they could work in them."

"Gwen," said Constance warmly. "You should not talk like that. You have helped literally hundreds of people, whose lives would have been the poorer if you had not."

Gwen shrugged, "Perhaps. I doubt it. However, I'm at it again!"

"You mean that you are 'taking steps'?" smiled Constance.

"Yes, to some purpose, I think, but where Margot and her children are concerned, she is an uncertain quantity. She wants their love more than she wants anything else. I think that her father, and her husband, both domineering men, have given her an inferiority complex, as far as her family is concerned, and of course her mixed blood has added to it. She is afraid to do anything that she thinks will make them think ill of her. I should think that it would be enough just to love your children, and hope for love from them, but then, I have never had children, so I don't know."

"Ian loves her, and so did Napier."

"Yes, I know. That is why she does not cater to Ian as she does to the others. At any rate, I am into it now, and want things to turn out as I have advised her. I should appreciate it so much if you will concentrate on Arthur this afternoon. It will be hard, for you and Ian have not many hours left. Brooke, I hope, will put Janet in a good humour. And keep Arthur away from his mother and Janet."

"I don't think Arthur cares very much for me now," demurred Constance.

"Nonsense," countered Gwen. "A beautiful woman can always make a man care for her. Now I must tell Brooke to be very, very attentive to Janet."

Constance laughed, as she sauntered over to the others. "What a general was lost, Gwen, when you weren't born a boy. I shall do my best."

They sat about, watching Ian and Janet, always at her best in the open, light the fire, and put on the kettle. Constance, to Arthur's delight, sat beside him. When she suggested that he make the cocktails, saying that she had heard so much about them, the man's pleasure was pathetic. Happily, with Constance's help, he dabbled about with ice, bottles, and the shaker. Constance watched with amusement as Brooke proceeded to charm Janet, but his eyes, smiling without mirth, the deepened lines that made the parenthesis of his fine mobile mouth smote her heart. She wondered if he were grieving for her, or for

his lost love, for though his passion was not spent, he would not find love again.

Soon they were all gathered about the fire sipping their cocktails. Constance beside Arthur praised them warmly, and was the first to have her glass refilled. They were too sweet, and too potent, but she felt that she did not care. If Ian, sitting on the other side of the fire did not look at her soon, did not, by a glance tell her that he loved her, she would, she thought, for the first time in her life, get drunk. All day he had avoided her. She wanted to meet his eyes, full of love for her, her lips burned to kiss the hollow in his brown throat. What crazy chance had brought these people together from opposite sides of the world, and was it all to end in unhappiness and frustration?

She looked across at them puzzled. Ian, Janet, even Lady MacKenzie were squatting on their haunches, the firelight pointing up the planes of their faces, bringing out sharply the high cheekbones, the long deep eyesockets, the strong jaws and jutting chins, their aquiline noses. Never had they seemed so alien as here by the fire, the poplar trees behind them, the shallow river racing by. She looked at Brooke leaning on his arm by Janet, at Gwen sitting uncomfortably erect. No. These people were not alien to the setting. It was the rest of them who looked out of place.

Ian, his white teeth gleaming in his tanned face, raised his glass to her, and laughed. "It's racial, Constance," he cried.

"What is racial?" she asked, startled.

"You noticed it, but did not realize what was puzzling you. The way we squat is racial. Some races squat, some sit cross-legged, some sit cross-legged with the soles of their feet up."

"Are you trying to be funny, Ian?" asked Janet coldly, as she hurriedly sat down, her feet tucked under her uncomfortably.

"Ah, but this is interesting," said Sir Brooke drawing his long body up, and clasping his knees. "Ian, I think that you have something there."

Janet could not hide her annoyance. "Don't be cross, Janet," cried the man, using her Christian name for the first time. She

coloured with pleasure, and her good humour was restored. "You know, you owe your beauty and a very rare and wonderful beauty it is, to your mother's race. You should accent those marks of race all the time. When you come over to stay with us, which of course you will, before very long, I want you to bring that buckskin coat you are wearing. You must ride in it. Am I not right, Gwen?"

"Yes, indeed. Janet looks even lovelier than usual in that coat."

"This thing?" cried Janet. "Why people would think that I was quite mad."

"Not at all," Gwen said. "If one is a little different from the great mass of mediocrity, one should exploit that difference."

Janet coloured. She could not be sure that they were serious, but she would not let them know that she doubted their sincerity.

"I have a beautiful white buckskin coat, skirt and gloves, made by one of the squaws on the reserve. I must show it to you when we get back to the house. I shall take it over to England, and wear it to an artists's ball," she said laughing.

"When do you wear it here, Janet?" asked Constance.

"I wear it when I ride in the Stampede parade."

"What!" the English visitors cried in chorus.

"Yes, indeed. The whole family and all the men ride with our outfit. All the ranches send in wild horses, cowboys, etc. Ian let me have one of the Palominos last year. He rode the other one."

"It would be something to see, Janet," cried Sir Brooke. "We shall be back for a Stampede, but only if you come to us for a visit first."

Go to them for a visit, thought Janet. What heaven that would be! But unless she won this battle with her mother, she would be doing Paris with Jack Steele, ashamed of him before her friends, looking greedily about for someone who could free her of him, who would keep her in Europe. She would fight to the last ditch at Trevor's to-night. Her mother must sell. Surely, when she heard Sir Brooke invite her over,

her mother would realize what an opportunity it was. She would go to England and stay with these people if she had to shoot bows and arrows, and let out Indian war-whoops for them.

As they drank their tea, and ate sandwiches, the talk became more and more intermittent. The long twilight began to close down. A flock of geese honked overhead, and ducks, in thousands, necks outstretched in rapid flight, sought their feeding grounds. The fire died down to a rose and grey glow. Silence settled on the group. At length Sir Brooke spoke his voice barely audible above the singing of the water.

"Lady MacKenzie, I speak for my wife and Constance, as well as for myself, when I thank you for this unforgettable experience. I think that it came to us, when we were all in a state of dissatisfaction with our lives, and ready for change. The whole trip has had a great effect on all of us. Speaking for myself, what I saw in the United States frightened me at times, despite the reassurance their strength gives my countrymen. What I saw in Canada puzzled me, and what I was doing rather appalled me, for when I really thought it through I could not see how it was going to get any of us out of our difficulties, and might well add to them. Since I have been at the Ranch, a certain large simplicity of the country has given me an opportunity to try and simplify the problems I have been working on as well. I hope to go home, and see if I can, in my small way, get others to help me do what I want to do. I am too old, and experienced to be sure even of myself. I may slip back to the old, easy way, but I shall have a try at it, and feel better for the trying. I am so grateful that you have made this possible."

There was a moment's silence. Lady MacKenzie, her face glowing, turned to Sir Brooke.

"You must not thank me. One should not be thanked for benefits received. I do think, though, that it his been a unique few days. Every one of us here has been facing great changes in his life, without being aware of it. These changes have, I think, been solidified, as it were, while we have been together, and I am sure that eventually, we shall all be the happier, and

the better for them. From the minute that I met you, I had a feeling—."

At this Trevor and her family broke into laughter. "When Margot has a feeling," he explained, "We all throw up our hands helplessly. And the damnedest part of it is, her feelings, whether of good or ill, are nearly always right."

Arthur murmured to Constance that there were more cocktails. The cocktails had been Arthur's contribution to a perfect outing, and she knew that if things turned out well for her, they were almost bound to be bad for him, despite his mother's feeling that they would all be happier. She could not let him down now, despite the fact that no one wanted them. She and Arthur passed them about. Ian, as he received his glass from her murmured something about having a walk after dinner. He would be at Trevor's later, though what good it would do to rehash the business all over again, he could not imagine, and it was her last night. He patted the ground beside him, and she sat close to him, happy once more. She had followed Gwen's instructions, and had been very kind to Arthur. These few minutes she would have by Ian's side.

They all toasted one another silently, and sat looking into the dying glow of the fire. The last light faded. A harvest moon, huge and round as a great wagon wheel, rose over the rim of the world and travelled up the high, blue sky. A little breeze sprang up, scattering the poplar leaves, and showering them with gold. With a sigh, they rose, stretching cramped muscles, putting out the fire, packing the picnic kit into the cars.

When Lady MacKenzie went to her room to dress for dinner, Annie was waiting for her.

"Oh, Annie," she exclaimed. "Such a wonderful picnic. Why have I lived all these years in town? I love it out here. I am soggy with contentment at this moment. But what are you doing here? You should be in the dining room. I'll look after myself."

"Nonsense," said Annie sharply. "I'll help you dress. You look dead tired, but it is a good tiredness one gets out here, a hot bath and you'll be gay as a two-year-old. George is going

to look after things, until I go down to wait on table. He says that you are all coming straight into the dining room. He says that you drank Mr. Arthur's cocktails at the picnic, and if he knows those cocktails, you'll be wanting nothing more to drink before dinner."

"Well, at any rate," said her mistress, as she slipped out of her clothes, "don't wait up for me tonight You and Wong have had far too much to do these past few days. I shall be late. I suppose you know that I am going to meet the family at Mr. Trevor's tonight. You and your fellow spy will have heard all about *that!*"

"Sure we know it," cackled Annie. "How that poor man puts up with the kit and boodle of you, I don't know. And there is to be champagne, too, at dinner, so if you get ginger ale in your glass don't be surprised. I guess I am talking a lot, but I just can't help it. You and I have been together so many years now, good and bad, that I hate to count 'em. You're going to need all your wits about you tonight, Lady MacKenzie. For once you are on the right track, and you stick to it." She busied herself about the dressing table for a moment, and then turned and faced her mistress solemnly, raising her little face, so like a wrinkled russet apple.

"Lady MacKenzie, if you don't stick to your guns tonight, at Mr. Trevor's, I'm giving you fair warning, I'll leave you!"

Lady MacKenzie looked at the tiny old woman, her smile warm and tender. "Annie, you would never leave me. We just could not do without each other," she said softly.

"Course I wouldn't," snapped Annie, sniffing vigorously. "But there's no harm threatening. And don't say that I didn't warn you."

Dinner was a quiet meal. Everyone was relaxed, sleepy from fresh air. After dinner they sat in the Big Room, and Arthur and Constance murmured over records, choosing mutual favourites, while the others relaxed before the great fire of poplar logs. Constance and Ian found their eyes frequently meeting, but they could find no way of making a graceful exit. At length, goodnights were said and the group broke up.

Margot MacKenzie waylaid Trevor and told him that the family would be over in a few minutes. He looked down at the woman, shaking his head.

"Ye gods, my dear, must we go through all that again?"

"It will be different this time, I promise you, Trevor."

His face lit up, then saddened. "I wish that I could believe you, Margot, but they will do you in again. They always have. You are a loving and tender woman, with a twisted mother complex. I know when and why it became twisted, and because of that I can forgive you. And I shall always love you. I wish to heaven that I could stop loving you. But after last night." He shook his handsome head again, looking down at her with pity.

She gazed up at him appealingly. "Sit beside me on the yellow sofa, Trevor," she begged. "I promise you again, but I shall need your help and your strength. George has told Ian to go over, and Janet will tell Arthur."

Trevor looked at this woman he had loved for so many years. He knew her every fault and her every weakness. It made no difference. He loved her. He stooped and kissed her tenderly, without passion. "My very dear, my poor dear," he said softly, as he left her.

Janet went to her room, staying only long enough to renew her lipstick and freshen herself. Her immaculate grooming was a part of her, a defence. She thought with distaste of her mother's black braids the night before. Leaving her room, she quietly slipped along the hall to the study, which she had seen Arthur enter. She knocked softly on the door and entered. Arthur was sitting relaxed in an easy chair gazing at a weird picture of a horse which he had set up on an easel beneath a light. He looked up, frowning, annoyed at the interruption.

"What the devil is that?" asked Janet, looking at the picture.

"The best thing that I have ever done, and it is good. If you knew anything about painting, which you don't, you would know that it is good," answered Arthur sourly.

"We are going over to Trevor's again," announced Janet, ignoring her brother's remarks.

"What, again!" he cried. He pulled his smoking jacket about him, and lighting a cigarette, settled back in his chair. "Not I. I have just lit the fire, and I am staying here for a while. I can't stand those sessions. I believe you like them. I don't want another attack such as I had last night."

His sister gave him a side glance from her long green eyes. "You and your heart," she smiled derisively. "You don't fool me, my dear brother. Well," She sat down on the corner of the table, swinging one foot. "You had better get all ready to work up another one. Mother told Jack this morning that she wouldn't sell the place. That is why he has gone off to town in a huff."

"What!" cried Arthur, jumping up from his chair and coming towards her, his head bent forward. "You must be crazy. It was all settled."

Janet shrugged. "That's what I thought, but we were wrong. I met Jack just at lunch time. He had just come from mother's room. If anyone is crazy, it is mother. I went to her right away and she would not discuss it. Said, in that high and mighty manner which she assumes, that we are all to meet at Trevor's and she will talk about it then."

She rose and pulled her mink coat about her shoulders. "If you won't come, and prefer to sit by the fireplace and contemplate your masterpiece, all right. As for me, I am going, and right now, before Trevor and Ian get in any of their dirty work."

"But what happened?" cried Arthur in despair. "I was sure everything was settled. I thought when mother said at the picnic today that we were all going to be happier, that she meant you and I could get away."

Janet shrugged into her coat.

"It's those damned English people."

The English people! Yes, of course. That two-faced Constance, babbling away about his going to Paris. What was her game, anyway? Perhaps she was afraid that her

precious Ian would lose some money; that Janet and Arthur would get more than their share.

"How do you know the English people had anything to do with it?" asked Arthur. "I don't see how they could. It simply is none of their business."

"I don't know," grinned Janet. "As mother would say, 'I have a feeling.' This whole visit has been crazy. We haven't known these people a week, and yet since we met them everyone in the family seems to have gone a bit mad. Ian falls in love. Trevor and mother decide to get married at their age. Even you, my dear Arthur," she smiled maliciously.

"Me!" cried the astonished man. "I have done nothing!"

"If you had done nothing, that would have been quite in character. But you have painted a picture." She nodded towards the picture. "It is a fantastic thing, and more like a unicorn than a horse, if it is like anything at all, but it *is* good."

Arthur's face glowed with pleasure. Rare praise has rare value. The man felt as if he loved this sister of his. "Wait a minute. I'll slip on an overcoat." If he could win praise from Janet for a painting he was going to Paris if anything he could do or say would change his mother's mind.

Ian was the last to appear at Trevor's. The scene was very similar to the night before.

"Well, here we are again," he laughed, as he came into the room where the family was sitting waiting for him. "What goes on?" Though he was smiling, his very bones ached with weariness. He had no heart to go through it all again. He had renounced Constance. She would be leaving tomorrow, and all he craved was to be alone with his desolate heart. He was glad now that they had not been able to get away from the others during the evening. It would only have made it harder for both of them. Constance might have persuaded him that they marry anyway. But he knew that it would not work. He had seen too many marriages ruined by the petty nagging of lack of money. Ian did not want riches, but he did want a certain standard of gracious living for his wife, especially such a wife as Constance.

Trevor, from the sofa where he was sitting beside Margot, said, "Pour us a drink, Ian, and then we shall talk. You had better make it a stiff one, for some of us are going to need it. I don't know who."

Ian walked over to the table. He poured the first drink and held it up to Trevor for his approval. The older man smiled that warm, affectionate smile he always had for the twins, and Ian thought "Poor devil, I guess he feels a bit like I do, even at his age."

When the drinks had been served they settled back in their chairs, each one loath to make the opening move. Finally Janet slowly placed her glass on a table beside her and looked significantly at the clock on the mantel.

"Well, Mother. You asked us to come here again. If you want us at the breakfast table in the morning, in good old Ranch tradition, as I suppose you do, for it would be just too bad if our English friends weren't nauseated on their last morning with a good old cowboy meal—I think that we had better start talking."

Trevor felt the small woman beside him flinch, and rage poured through him. "I don't know why Margot has called us together again, any more than you do, Jenny," he said coldly. "One thing I do know. Tonight I have made up my mind that your threats, your heart attacks, your contempt aren't going to count for a damned thing! I am tired to death of having the woman I love chivvied by you and Arthur. You have exploited her love for you for years."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Ian.

Janet turned on her brother furiously. "Oh, shut up!" she said. "And Arthur, for heaven's sake stop twirling that tassel on your gown."

Arthur jumped and dropped the tassel. Ian grinned, displaying his strong white teeth in his tanned face in a smile that was mocking and cruel.

"Tut, tut, Janet," he said softly. "I think there is a battle ahead for you. You will likely win it. You always have, but it is poor tactics to lose your temper before it has even begun. I have not the slightest idea why we were called over here

tonight. I'm sure George knew, but he wasn't talking. But ever since I have come into the room I have had the impression that you and Arthur have come to the end of a long series of victories. Am I right, Mother?"

"Don't Ian," pleaded Margot MacKenzie. There was infinite sadness in the look she gave him, as she sat forward turning her glass in her small brown hand. In her dark eyes her son saw regret for all the times she had sacrificed the twins, her best beloved, to these difficult children of hers. Compunction smote him.

"Napier and I have always understood mother," he said softly.

A great light flooded the woman's face. "Ian, thank you, my dear. No words have made me happier."

"Oh, for goodness' sake," broke in Arthur petulantly, "what is this all about? As Jenny says, if we are to be up for a nine o'clock breakfast, let us get started. After my attack last night I should be in my bed. Here am I, out in this godforsaken place, without any of my heart medicine—"

"You never took medicine for your heart in your life," shouted Ian.

"He did so," cried Janet. "It is a shame the way you sneer about Arthur's health, just because you are as strong as an ox. And no wonder he has a bad heart, living in this altitude. He simply has to get away."

Trevor, holding Margot's hand tightly, felt it begin to tremble.

"Stop it, Janet!" he protested sharply. "I won't have Margot tortured in order that you and Arthur can go gadding about the world. There is not one damned thing wrong with Arthur's heart. All he needs is a good day's work."

"Trevor, the boy is not strong," expostulated Margot.

"Oh, Mother, Trevor is right. Every time Arthur wants something from you he pulls this heart attack," said Ian impatiently.

Janet turned on her brother furiously. "All that you and Trevor want is to keep the Ranch for your filthy farming,"

she raged. Then she turned to her mother. "I told you last night what would happen if you won't sell the Ranch, Mother, and I mean it. I have been stuck in this hole long enough, and I am getting out. It is up to you how I do it."

There was a brief silence. Lady MacKenzie closed her eyes and her face was inscrutable. For the first time real doubt struck Arthur and Janet. This was not the easy capitulation to which they were accustomed.

"Now that the tumult and the shouting have died," Trevor said quietly, "perhaps Margot had better tell us whatever it is that she has asked us to come and hear. I have no idea what it is, but I am tired of these family rows. There have been far too many of them lately, and they take too much out of your mother. Well, Margot?" He turned to her, and his smile was very tender. "You are a woman of courage. I want you to do the thing that you think is right. I ask nothing of you for myself, and I promise you that there will be no more arguments and shouting. We shall abide by your decision whatever it is. The family has met in my home to hear it, and the first one who raises his or her voice to you will go out that door. I'll put up with no more of it." He looked across the room and met the approving eyes of Ian. He drew a deep breath. *Did* she have the courage? He doubted it.

There was a tense silence, and then Lady MacKenzie spoke. "Ian, I want a drink. I really need one, dear."

"Certainly." The man jumped up and took her glass. Janet moved impatiently, sitting erect, her eyes fastened on her mother's face. Arthur began twirling the tassel of his gown furiously, then guiltily dropped it. He wished he knew whether Jenny wanted him to have another heart attack or not, but he was not anxious to have one unless it was absolutely necessary. He sensed that it would not be the success they had been heretofore.

Margot MacKenzie sipped her Scotch slowly, and in awe her family saw that trembling little figure assume the pose and dignity which always impressed them. "Where does she

get it?" wondered Ian. "From the Indian Chief, or the Highland chief? Not one of us has it. Janet fakes it, as she is doing now, but with mother it is innate."

At length she spoke, her dark hooded eyes avoiding the gaze of those about her, as she looked into the amber liquid in her glass.

"I am sorry if I aroused hopes in Arthur and Janet last night which cannot be fulfilled," she began in a low voice that trembled. "I have made up my mind that I shall not sell the Ranch, not even the oil leases, which my father left me, and which Trevor, with greater effort than any of you will ever realize, has kept free from debt. I am going to marry him and live in this house, which has always been a refuge to me in my darkest days. Ian will marry Constance Howard and live in the Ranch house. Trevor will run cattle and Ian will farm that section of it which he thinks suitable. My decision is irrevocable."

She leaned back on the sofa and closed her eyes, pressing back her tears. Her heart went out to her two weaklings, and she loved them more at that moment than she ever had before. Trevor and Ian looked at each other in amazement, weak with joy and relief.

Suddenly Janet jumped up. "Very well, Mother." Her voice was low and tense with rage. "When one's own mother indulges in a ridiculous old-age romance, I suppose that there is nothing a daughter can do to save her from making a fool of herself. Trevor has played his cards well. You have sacrificed yourself, your children and a fortune to him. It seems very strange to me that ever since he took over the management of the estate there has been no money for the family. There was plenty of it before. If you have one grain of sense left you will have an accountant go over his books. And now, before my future stepfather has the opportunity of throwing me out, as he so charmingly threatened, I shall leave."

She stood up, and drawing her coat over her shoulders, she walked to the door. Ian sprang up and held it open for her, bowing mockingly. She threw him a sidelong glance from

her green eyes that was so desperate with rage and frustration that it was frightening. Her green dinner dress, under the tawny coat, clung to her long thighs, as with head high, she swept through the hall and out of the front door. To Ian she looked like a driven fox. He came back into the room and stood by the fireplace. He should be happy, but he was not. That would come later. Now he could think only of what this decision had cost his mother. She was leaning against Trevor, his arm about her shoulders, looking spent and sad. He turned to Arthur. Poor devil, he supposed that he had had his dreams, too, which were now shattered as he had thought his were last night.

The man sat shrunk back in his chair, a look of bewilderment on his characterless face. His mother had deserted him. Janet had deserted him. Constance, who had been close to him for a few minutes, had been a traitor. He wanted to cry to high heaven, like a coyote, against such injustices. His life was as important to him as their lives were to them. He would not give up like Jenny had. He would fight for his rights.

He sat up and cleared his throat. "If Janet goes away with Jack Steele, and that is just what she will do, and you live out here, Mother, how on earth am I to live all alone in that great barracks of a place in town?"

Trevor looked at him in surprise, then said patiently, "I wouldn't worry about Janet and Jack Steele, Arthur. I think that Jack is in love with Jenny, anyone can see that, but he is an ambitious man. If Jenny can't bring him anything but herself and her beauty, he will not allow her to mess up his political life. As for the home in town, Arthur, there just will not be such a thing. I have been trying for months to hammer it into your head and Janet's, that the money your mother had has been spent."

"What?" cried Arthur.

Trevor shook his head. "The city will take it for taxes, along with all the rest of the town property. Steele will see to that."

"Yes," sighed Margot. "He threatened me with that the first time he talked to me about this wretched oil business. I shall hate to give up the big house in town."

"You mean," exclaimed Arthur, "that we have nothing but the Ranch?"

"Very little. Some bonds that your mother has, a thousand or so from the sale of the furniture in the town house, some odds and ends, Ian's gratuity and savings, all of which will have to go straight into equipment, and what I have, which is no fortune. We are going to live off the place."

"Then, Mother, you *are* quite mad!" said Arthur emphatically. "You have a small fortune in your hand, you need the money and yet, in order to humour Ian and Trevor you are throwing it away."

"There is more to it than that, Arthur," said his mother, wearily. "Even if I tried to explain, I doubt if you would understand my reasons."

"I admit that it takes some explaining," said Arthur dryly.

"Instead of selling anything," his mother went on, "I am trying to buy something—a way of life. It is late, I know that. I should have moved out here when your father died."

The man snorted. "And while you are buying a way of life, for you and Trevor, for Ian and Constance, what do you buy for Janet and me? We *are* your children, too, you know."

"Oh, damn it, Arthur, be fair!" cried Ian hotly. "Mother has looked after you and Janet all your lives. If she had not given in to your every whim she would not be in the financial straits she is in now. And what have either of you done for her?"

"Just about the same as yourself."

Ian flushed. What indeed? He had always taken from her, unthinkingly. It was only because his wants were simple that he had demanded less from her. But Lady MacKenzie was thinking. "He loves me. What more would any mother want from her children but just that?"

Trevor spoke. "You and Janet will always have a home here, Arthur. If you knew more of life, you would realize that that is a great gift you are being offered."

"Here?" cried Arthur contemptuously.

"Yes, right here. If you are an artist you can paint any place in the whole world; nothing can stop you, but lack of time and materials. If you are a poet, and I understand that you think you are also that, you can express yourself any place, and your public will be the whole English-speaking world, if you are clever enough, and that is taking in a good bit of territory. Ian and I shall see that you will get your share of the profits from the Ranch, if and when there are any," he grinned, looking at Ian. "After we have taken out our fair share of wages. The pampering days are over, and that is final." He stood up and felt in his pocket for his pipe.

"Now I am going to take your mother across to the house and let Annie put her to bed. Ian, I suppose, will be scratching at the screen of Constance's window, to tell her the good news, so there will be no one to put you to bed tonight."

Ian looked up quickly and blushed under his tan. Damn that George! Trevor lit his pipe and drew Margot to her feet, then suddenly with an air of contrition he went over to Arthur and put a hand on his shoulder.

"My dear boy, for the love your mother has for you, play ball with us. If you are not content, she will not be content. The English girl says that you have painted a good picture. Stay here and paint more. If you have done it once, you can do it again and again. You will learn to express yourself, not the ideas of other people. We are all going to have to learn to be poor, and the lessons are not easy, but sometimes they produce wonderful results."

He looked at Ian and smiled. "We shall need you here, Arthur, to teach the next generation of the MacKenzies something of art and literature, for that generations will not be going abroad to schools. It is Uncle Arthur who will have to keep them on their toes. Your mother said that she was buying a new way of life for her family with that oil money she is not going to get. Help us make a success of the deal, Arthur. We need your help."

Arthur's face glowed. He went to his mother, and stooping, kissed her. Ian could feel the tears stinging his eyes. "I

am game, Mother," he said simply. He, who despised a slang expression.

They poured drinks and toasted each other in solemn silence. Everything seemed to have been said. The three men sat silent avoiding the woman's eyes which, sombre and black triangles in her dark face, looked into the depths of the fire. They knew that she was thinking of Janet. She sighed heavily. What a mess she had made of things. Of her five children she had given happiness to only two, the strong ones. Surely a low percentage, yet she looked back on a life in which their happiness was her chief aim. Napier had been the victim of the world's stupidities, not hers, but she had failed Gordon; tragically she had failed Gordon, and Janet and Arthur. She sighed heavily and looked about the room.

"Well?" she said at length.

Trevor knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the grate. "I'll take you over now, Margot. It is late. Sir Brooke and George and I are going out shooting early, but we shall be back for breakfast. Want to come, Ian?"

Ian shook his head. "I want to take Constance out for a ride, but we'll go after breakfast. Mother, will you knock at her door and tell her?"

"Shall I tell her anything else?"

"No, Mother," he smiled. "That is why I am taking her riding."

"Up to the coney hole?"

He nodded happily. "Oh, Napier, Napier," cried the woman's heart. "You will never go to their coney hole and hold a woman close in your strong brown arms. You will never marry, have children, see the mountains and the moon again, nor ride across the hills." She fought down a feeling of bitterness and jealousy against the one twin, who would get in such measure what was forever denied the other. Ian was looking at her closed face, a small-boy look in his eyes, asking her approval, her pleasure in his happiness. He knew that she was too much a woman of the world not to have sensed the relationship of Constance and Brooke. She went

over to him, and raising her slender arms, put them about his neck He stooped and kissed her.

"Are you pleased, Mother? You *do* like Constance, don't you?"

"Nothing has ever made me happier, Ian," she said warmly. "If I had the choosing of your wife it would be such a girl as Constance. Good-night, Arthur. You have been so kind to me." She went over and kissed him as he stood by the fire. He looked surprised and gratified by her caress, while wondering if she had the slightest idea of what her decision had cost him. And he had taken it lying down. He was disgusted with himself. Jenny would certainly raise hell in the morning, but she had no business to walk out and leave him to handle things alone. And he was tired of rows. It might not be too bad at that. He would paint. He would have his little group out to the Ranch house. It might be quiet an effective way of entertaining.

Margot MacKenzie was smiling, trying desperately to keep back the tears. The last big log settled into its rose-gray ash with a shower of sparks. Quietly they left the house, walking into the moon-drenched night. And Lady MacKenzie's heart was crying "Jenny! Jenny!"

Chapter Thirteen

THEY paused at the gate, looking about them. The sky was clear and the mountains tipped by moonlight were crowding together in all their fantastic grandeur against it. The foothills and the fields lay about them in that alert silence the moon gives when it lies silver on the land. Trevor and Ian, looking about them, felt reassured. Margot MacKenzie would never regret what she had done. She turned to her son and he eagerly waited word from her to tell him this.

"Ian, will you step in on your way to bed and tell Wong that I want pea soup for lunch? It will take time to prepare it. I doubt if our guests have tasted real French-Canadian pea soup."

The men laughed, glad to have an unemotional topic brought up after their recent session. "Mother and her food," exclaimed Arthur. "The world could be coming to an end, and mother would still be thinking about feeding the family."

"It is a very sensible thing to think about," she said. "What the world needs is fewer people in it, better fed. A great deal of the world's troubles would disappear if that could come about. Instead, with the usual stupidity of man, we are having more and more people, with less and less for them to eat, until eventually, I suppose, the world will starve itself to death."

"You see, Mother," Ian cried eagerly. "That is my problem. How to produce more food, to meet the increased demand."

"I should think that compulsory birth control would be a simpler solution, but then simple methods are not popular among the experts. We are outsmarting ourselves. Well, good-night, my dear boys."

She moved on, followed by Trevor. As they walked along the path to the Ranch house, the man was filled with a quiet peace and happiness, mingled with pity for the woman at his side.

"I don't know how to tell you all the things I want to say, Margot."

"Don't try, Trevor," she said wearily. "I had made up my mind that I was doing the right thing, and so I went through with it. But it is hard to believe that what brings happiness to oneself and unhappiness to those you love, *is* the right thing. I am staying on for a few days. We shall talk tomorrow night."

They passed through the gate and up the path to the verandah steps, where they paused.

"I am worried about Janet, Trevor."

"I know you are, my dear. Margot, I don't think that she will go off the deep end with Jack Steele, which is what you are troubled about. He won't want her now. He knows that he cannot travel with Janet unless he has a packet of money, and your refusal to sell has scotched that for the time being. Ian and I have looked into his financial position a bit, and he is hard up. Of course, since he has always been a great spender, Janet has no idea of that. As I see it, the bounder will go to Ottawa and try to pull a fast one there. In that case Janet will be of no use to him."

"Poor Janet. What on earth is the matter with her, Trevor? Until tonight I have tried so hard to help her, but she always comes a cropper."

"Perhaps the stand you have taken tonight is the greatest help you have ever given her. Don't worry about the girl.

She will come out all right. She is all mixed up, that is her trouble. She would be perfectly happy on the Ranch if she would allow herself to be. She loves horses and the shooting, the country, yet at the same time she despises all these things. She is not man-mad; she only craves their admiration. She must make them fall in love with her, by any means whatever, and as soon as she has their love she despises *that*. She is looking for something that she will not despise, and imagines now that the only way she can find it is to go gallivanting around the world searching for it. Just leave her to her next husband to worry about. When she finally gets one rich enough to give her the things she wants, important enough to impress her, and strong enough to bully her, she will settle down and be happy."

Margot MacKenzie laughed softly. "That is a large order, but perhaps she will find a man who can fill it. Do you think I should go to her now and talk to her?"

"Good heavens, no!" exploded the man. "She will awaken everyone in the house with her storming and send you to bed an utter wreck. Promise me this," he went on seriously. "Don't see Janet tonight, and don't take any drinks." The moon lit up his kind grey eyes and outlined the strong contours of his lined face.

"How did you know about that?" whispered Margot, looking up at him quickly. "George or Annie, I suppose. I can't understand why you listen to servant's gossip. It has only been in the last year or two. Life had become so drab, like a bolt of dull grey flannel, every day unwinding, yard by yard. And there was Napier. I could not face the nights."

"I understand, my dear." The man stooped and kissed her tenderly. "We shall do our drinking together from now on. If you can't sleep tonight, have Annie give you a pill. I gave her some for you today."

"Really, Trevor," chuckled Margot. "What kind of life am I going to have with all of you. There will be Wong and you now. It was bad enough with George and Annie."

"Promise?" persisted Trevor.

"Yes," she answered solemnly. "I promise."

Well content, he bade her goodnight. She slipped softly along the dimly-lit hall and turning towards the guest wing tapped at Constance's door.

"Yes?" came the startled voice of the girl.

"It is I, Margot MacKenzie. May I come in?" she said softly. "I have a message for you."

"Please do," said Constance, sitting up and turning on the bed lamp.

Lady MacKenzie opened the door and came over to the bed. "I have just been talking to Ian, at Trevor's house," she whispered. "He wants you to ride with him immediately after breakfast. He was afraid that you might get involved in some other arrangements, so asked me to tell you."

"I thought that all of you were in bed hours ago," said Constance softly. "What has happened? You look different."

"I should," said Margot. "For everything is going to be different for me from now on." She looked at the girl, leaning back against the pillows, and her heart filled with pity. So she had been lying here alone in the strange land, weeping!

"We gathered at Trevor's tonight to talk over our mixed-up affairs. Ian wants to tell you about it himself on your ride. I can say nothing more than that. You must go straight to sleep now, in order to look more beautiful than you ever have before."

The girl's face lit up. "Oh, Lady MacKenzie!" she murmured, tears starting to her eyes again as she searched under her pillow for her handkerchief. "Do you mean—?"

"I can't tell you what I mean, dear," she whispered conspiratorially. "I promised Ian that I would not say a word. But have a good sleep, my dear, full of happy dreams."

She went softly out of the room All she wanted was sleep, a long heavy sleep, pills or a drink, she did not care which, as long as she had a spell of forgetting. Annie was sitting upright in a chair, knitting furiously.

"Annie," cried her mistress. "How often do I have to tell you that when I am late you must go to bed."

Annie rose and looked at Lady MacKenzie sharply, who grinned at her and shook her head. "I am not telling you a thing, Annie."

"And I haven't asked you a thing," Annie replied with dignity. "All I want is that you get into bed." She moved about deftly and swiftly. When her mistress, with a sigh of relief slipped between the covers, Annie pulled back the curtains from the wide windows and moved towards the door.

"Annie," said Lady MacKenzie softly.

Annie pretended that she had not heard.

"Annie," her mistress repeated.

Annie turned, her brown walnut of a face troubled. "Yes, Lady MacKenzie?"

"The pill, Annie. That is all I want."

"Oh, the pill," cried Annie with relief. "It is right here in my knitting bag." She went into the bathroom for a glass of water and came back to the bedside.

The woman spoke hesitatingly. "When did Miss Janet come in, Annie? She left before the rest of us."

"Miss Janet is all right, if that is what you mean," said Annie tartly. "Now don't get worrying about her. Swallow this pill and have a good night's sleep."

She went out and left Margot MacKenzie lying in bed, gazing out across her wide acres, that brooded, dark and silent beneath the light of a waning moon. "They are mine," her heart cried. "Still mine. I have kept the Ranch, Father, and thank you for it. Napier will be pleased." Peace stole through her. The paper-thin lids closed over the dark, deep-set eyes, and she slept.

Everyone gathered in the sunroom at the end of the dining room before breakfast, where George was serving Collinses. The sky was overcast. The golden land had turned grey and drab. A wind that had sprung up in the night had torn every glittering leaf from the poplars, and the mountains were white with snow. Miniature cyclones, like dusty, whirling dervishes, tore across the country. It was cold, unbelievably cold to the people from England, and they all gathered about the fire, grateful for its warmth.

Trevor and Sir Brooke, their faces still tingling from the cold air, talked of their luck. Sir Brooke was excited because he had seen his first prairie chickens and bemoaned the fact that one could not shoot them. He was in good humour, having shot two mallard ducks.

Arthur stood looking unhappily out of the window. Last night the prospect had not seemed too dreadful. Today, all the beauty which the sun gave the country was gone. He looked ahead, and could only picture the dreary part of Ranch life, the loneliness, the wind eternally whining about the house, the dust, the blizzards that would come occasionally turning the country into a white cold hell of swirling snow and piling drifts. He could only remember the late springs, with their days of fine softly sifting snow, that piled itself higher and higher, defying the calendar. He was in no mood to remember that belated sudden burst of life and loveliness, when prairie crocuses sprang into bloom and trees burst into leaf. He forgot the song of the meadow lark, the sudden heat, that quite literally enabled one to *see* things growing. Winter was in his soul, winter was upon the land.

As if to emphasize the fact, his mother said, "We have been lucky to have had such weather. The warm sunny days will come again, of course, and we may have good weather until Christmas, but we shall have cold weather now, a touch of winter. I smell snow."

"Smell it?" laughed Lady Denton.

"Yes," nodded Ian. "Mother says that she can smell snow coming, and she is right. The snow always comes."

He crossed the room to Constance, who stood a little apart from the group around the fire. "Did mother speak to you about riding with me?" he asked.

Constance nodded.

"And you will?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course, darling," she murmured. "We leave this afternoon. I was afraid that we might not have an opportunity of being alone, until your mother came to my room last night. May I have the Palomino?"

"You like that horse, don't you?" Ian smiled. "Well, she is yours. My wedding gift, if you will accept her."

Their eyes met in a long look, and neither could move, nor break the silence for the love and passion that swept through them. At length Ian broke the spell. "We must leave directly after breakfast, or we may get caught in a snow storm. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were snowed in, and you could not leave?" he smiled.

"Oh, but we would *have* to leave," cried Constance, the secretary again. "We have cut things very fine. Brooke has these speaking engagements."

A shadow passed over Ian's face. "Yes, of course," he said curtly, and Constance wished that she had not spoken of it.

At that moment, Annie came to the door, and beckoned Ian. Constance saw him speak to the maid, and then go over and say something to his mother in a low voice. She stiffened, and spoke to Trevor. Constance joined Arthur, still looking gloomily out of the window at the first flakes of snow that were drifting down.

"Is there going to be a storm, Arthur?" she asked anxiously.

Arthur looked up and smiled sardonically. "No, no, not a storm; just a little snow and wind and cold. Golden days cannot last forever. Do you think that you can stand it, Constance?"

She shook her head slowly. "I must, Arthur. It is just one of those things. If I had to live in an igloo in the Arctic, it would be the same. As far as I am concerned, my place is wherever Ian is."

"Well, God help you. At any rate, you have courage."

"I don't know what happened last night. Your mother came in and said just enough to arouse my hopes again. Ian is to tell me this morning, when we ride, but of course, I have a very good idea of what his news is. I hope that you will help me in my new life, Arthur. You will be the strongest link with the life I have known. I am too old to think that it will be all moonlight and roses for me in the future."

Arthur looked at her, his face glowing with pleasure. "You can count on me, Constance," he said, and was startled by the

echo of last night's words. "I'm like some idiot of a boy scout," he thought disgustedly. "Dripping good will all over the place."

The tantalizing smell of broiled ham and coffee came from the dining room, and Lady MacKenzie suggested that they go in to breakfast. "Janet will not be down, so there is no need to wait any longer."

"Will there be pancakes and maple syrup, Margot?" asked Gwen. "I really am disgusted with myself the way I have thought of food, during this entire visit. But if I could have one more meal of pancakes and maple syrup, I think that it would ease the pain of parting."

"Not going to pass up the ham and eggs, Gwen," laughed her husband.

"I'm certainly passing up nothing. As well as ham and eggs, however, pancakes and maple syrup."

Constance broke it as they seated themselves. "I shall have porridge and heavy cream, and home-made butter on home-made toasted bread, piled high with chokecherry and saskatoon jelly. I am sorry for the horse, but there it is. I shall never be able to go back to a breakfast of fruit juice and black coffee again."

Lady MacKenzie looked about the table and beamed, remembering how her men folk had laughed at her last night, when in the midst of her worries, she had thought of pea soup. If only Janet were at the table, she would be content, and contentment was a great gift of life. She had known, when she received the cable about Napier, that she would never know happiness again. But there were years to be filled in before she would know the answer to the greatest of all riddles. So far, she had been unable to fill them. They were indeed empty years, but now it seemed to her that if only she could see Janet settled, the years would be good years, such as Napier would want her to have. And at the end, she would find him again, or find oblivion.

She looked across the table at Trevor, and he was watching her anxiously. He knew. He knew that every minute, almost, of every day, Napier was in her thoughts. When she read a

book, and wondered what he would have thought of it; when she had problems, and wondered what he would have advised her to do about them; above all, when she sat, as now, among her family, doing the little everyday things of life, which he had carried on with such gusto, she missed him most of all. As long as dear Trevor knew that she was only half alive, all would be well with them. And he did know, and was satisfied that it should be so.

"And now," she said, busy with the coffee pot. "What arrangements have you made for this morning? Lunch is at one-thirty, and we shall have tea in the Big Room at three-thirty." She suddenly put down the large silver pot, and looked about her. "I can't bear the thought of your leaving," she said pathetically.

"It has been wonderful, hasn't it, Margot?" broke in Gwen hurriedly, her beautiful eyes shining. "But it is not over of course. We have found each other, and we shall keep each other. If I had a daughter, I should insist that she marry Arthur, to strengthen our ties, but as I haven't, I must look around for a niece. I shall send her over here for a holiday. I think Nancy would do nicely, don't you, Brooke?"

Her husband burst into laughter, but not Arthur. He was thinking, "By Jove, that is an idea!"

"Arthur," warned Brooke, twinkling at the man. "You may as well be measured for the harness right away. Gwen has six unmarried nieces, and I am sure that everyone of them would be glad to find a handsome husband in Canada. Yes, Gwen," he laughed, "Nancy by all means."

Arthur, immediately resolving to take off fifteen pounds, said with a smile. "Is it one of those packages of sweets we used to buy as children, sight unseen, or may I know something of my future wife, Lady Denton?"

"Certainly," Sir Brooke broke in, rather maliciously, "That is a reasonable request. At present, she is a Communist."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Arthur.

"But not permanently," broke in Gwen, hurriedly. "She would never consent to have her money of which she has considerable, taken from her. She just likes to help the cause.

Next year she may be a sculptor, making odd shaped things from tin; you know the type. She is about your age, a little younger, I think, not good looking, but rather distinguished looking, and I must warn you, she has my penchant for arranging other people's affairs. But she has a heart of gold, hasn't she Constance?"

Constance laughed. "Indeed she has, Gwen. She is always helping young artists, studying new movements, both political and artistic, and working on them." She smiled at Arthur, then looked serious. "Arthur, Gwen is quite right as always. I can just *see* Nancy as your wife."

Arthur looked around the table, smiling. "I am in love with Nancy already," he cried. "And of course, would be greatly honoured to be taken into your family. If Nancy, after meeting me, will do me the honour of marrying me, it will make me very happy."

Sir Brooke threw up his hands. "This is the craziest group of people I have ever encountered. Even Gwen has gone a bit mad. Arthur, I am warning you, Nancy will accept you."

"Splendid!" said Arthur. "We shall be looking forward eagerly to her visit, just as soon as she can manage it." He turned to Lady Denton. "Please do not think," he said gently, "that I am interested in your niece because you mentioned money. As you know, I have nothing. You spoke of her enthusiasms. I have never had any one close to me who shared mine. The same, I imagine, is true of your niece. It is a thing far more precious to me than riches; that she should be enthusiastic about the arts, for all my enthusiasms are drying up in an arid soil. I fell in love with your niece, because you said that next year she might be making sculptures with tin. I think that Nancy is lonely, and so am I."

There was a sudden silence about the table. Everyone looked at Arthur with a new respect.

"Good chap," suddenly ejaculated Sir Brooke, "Nancy it is."

Lady Denton was leaning forward looking at Arthur with kindness, as she swing her pince nez. "Arthur is right, and I have never thought of it. I am sure, that in our family,

Nancy has been a lonely soul. She has had no one to share her enthusiasms with her and we are a very closely knit family. And now, Margot, you were asking about plans."

"Yes," cried Sir Brooke. "Do let us discuss them, for I am sure they will be interesting. It seems as if every hour since we have been here, something momentous has happened to one of us. Arthur's engagement is the latest." He turned his charming smile on them. Ian, watching him, wished that he could hate him. He felt that that should be his natural reaction, but he could not. Sir Brooke was miles above him in culture, position, brains. He moved restlessly. How could he hold Constance, with what he had to offer? Was her love for him just a sudden infatuation, that she would get over, and regret? He should not have hurried her, he should have given her more time. He met Brooke's effort to keep the group about the table on a note of banter.

"I shall start it," he said. "I am going for a ride with Constance, then I must go over to my small laboratory for a bit, and look after some flies I have over there that must be checked."

Trevor laughed. "I'm always the dull one, but my task this morning is a happy one. I am going to tote up the number of pounds of beef on the hoof that we have out here, and figure what they will be worth when they are fattened, and we get our $28 a hundred for them. In the depression days they would not bring as much money each as a small turkey."

"And you, Arthur," asked Gwen.

"If you do not mind being troubled about it, I should like to wrap up my horse picture, and send it to Nancy for a present."

"Arthur, that is very sweet of you. And I assure you that there is nothing you could send the girl that would please her as much."

"Now, Sir Brooke, you insisted on this. What are your plans?"

"George and I are going over the Double Circle Ranch. We became great friends this morning, when we were out

shooting. I should like to steal him from you. The man has an astounding knowledge of world affairs. If I had him at home with me, I would know better than any politician in England what the people were thinking."

The MacKenzie family laughed. "You are right there," said Trevor. "George is a bit uncanny. He is also a super spy, and of course his talents are wasted here. The trouble is that if you had him, I am quite sure that he would know every political secret in your head, within a week. He is too dangerous for men like you to have about. Now for the ladies. Miss Constance, what are you doing on your last morning?"

"As Ian said, we are going for a ride. Then I must come back and look up Clem and Slim and say good-bye to them."

"Clem and Slim?" queried Gwen, wonderingly. "Now, my dear girl, who are Clem and Slim?"

"They are the first friends that I made at the Ranch," laughed Constance. "Cowpunchers, I think they are called. At any rate, one is the best roper in the country, and the other the best chuck wagon driver. I have their own word for that. They like me, and when they see me in the distance, they whistle at me. It makes me feel very young and light-hearted. They have taken years off my life."

"The good old wolf call," grinned Ian. "You should see those lads all dressed up like Christmas trees, when we take our outfit to the Calgary Stampede. They think the town and all the girls in it belong to them, and their horses. Once Clem roped a governor-general riding in state in an open car in the procession. That was not as smart as he thought it was, but the experience didn't seem to tame him at all. Hotel men hate them. They think that it is their special privilege to ride their horses into the beer parlour when they want a drink."

"They have cost us a pretty penny, getting them out of their difficulties," laughed Lady MacKenzie. "But they nearly always bring home the prize money."

"Constance, when and where did you meet them?" said Brooke. She met his smiling eyes. It was the first time for

days that they had looked at each other with a sense of mutual laughter, they who had laughed together so often, and the girl's heart felt warmed.

"I met them the first afternoon I was here, down by one of the corrals. It was the same afternoon that I met the white bull."

Everyone shouted with laughter. "You see," said Sir Brooke. "We *are* all a bit mad. Constance, the product of an English rectory has been leading a double life for the past few days; one with us, and one with cowpunchers and white bulls. Where is this animal?"

"He is Ian's pet, so he has a fine box stall in one of the cow barns where he stands brooding with small, mean, unhappy eyes like a rich old rake thinking of his past conquests."

"I must see the old boy," the man laughed, and only Constance caught the look of self derision in his eyes.

"Then I shall come back to the house and pack," the girl hurried on.

Ian looked at her with level eyes that had darkened, and she wished that she had not mentioned packing. She knew now that her joy on their ride would be tempered. Lady MacKenzie, had seen the look that her son had sent the girl, and had noted Constance's concern. Poor silly fool, thought the woman. He has now achieved all that his heart desired, so he must seek something else to worry about. Well, the girl could manage him. They were made for each other, and Constance knew it, instinctively. She would use her beauty and passion wisely, for she was experienced, and she loved Ian.

"Well, Gwen," she broke in, rather hurriedly. "Our last few hours seem to be a summing up. What are your plans? Whatever they are, I hope they include me."

"Of course," said Gwen, tapping out her cigarette. "You and I are going to sit before the fire in your room and talk. We shall say so much, that when we sit before the fire in *my* room, very soon, I hope, we shall be constantly saying, 'Do you remember that day at the Ranch, when we said—.' Such talk between women seals friendships."

Margot smiled happily. "You do say such heart-warming things, Gwen. Let us, then, go our appointed ways." She rose and turning to Annie said, "For goodness' sake, tell Wong to stop hovering and grinning at that door. No one can eat another bite. We have risked our lives to give him pleasure this morning."

They laughed and went from the room. The two older women walked through the wide halls to Lady MacKenzie's bedroom, and made themselves comfortable in the deep chintz chairs on each side of the fire.

"Well, Margot," said Gwen. "I have interfered again in another's life. I seem to be unable to stop myself. I know that last night at Mr. Holland's you kept your promise to me. One look at Constance, at Mr. Holland, at Ian, at Arthur, too, I'm afraid, told me that. Poor Arthur," she smiled wryly, then brightened. "At any rate, I've settled things for Arthur. I can't think of a more suitable match. Of course Nancy will boss him, but it will be a nice bossing. She will arrange for him to do the very things that he wants to do. And she will be happy also. She has always been so much alone."

"Gwen," Margot looked her surprise. "Were you serious?"

"Of course I was serious. Arthur knows that. So does Brooke. Nancy has always been a bit of a problem, skittering about from one fad to another, with too much money. She is not young, but neither is Arthur. Quite nice looking too, in a lean, tweedy way. It will be wonderful for her to have an artist of her very own. Yes," she nodded sagely. "Nancy will come to visit you as soon as you write to her. And she will marry Arthur, and they will live happily ever after. So that worry is off your mind."

Margot laughed. "Gwen, you are a born fixer. It seems too good to be true. I never realized before how lonely he has been all his life."

"But you are worried about Janet," said Gwen anxiously.

"Yes. The problem child still remains. It does not seem right that I should achieve contentment at my daughter's expense. I am getting old, and have lived most of my life.

Janet is young and beautiful and I feel that I am shoving her into danger, this poor restless creature, in whom the blood of two races has never mixed. Arthur is entirely alien to my mother's people, both physically and tempermentally. He is the product of a white civilization whose parents spoilt him, when they became unexpectedly wealthy. Ian and Napier are, I think, a mixture of the best of both. Poor Gordon had the worst of both. I should have seen all this. I can look back now, and wonder that I did not. Like all experiences, it came too late to help, or should I use the word wisdom? At any rate, I brought the alien blood into the family, and its problems were my responsibility." The little dark figure was despondent.

"I think that you dwell too much on that," said Gwen severely.

"Just lately," explained Margot. "I never used to think about it. I am becoming more Indian every day—in my looks, my gropings towards the life of my mother's race, in my strange, troubled dreams. When I was born, many of the good old families here had a touch of Indian blood. We never gave it a thought. In England, at school, I did not mention it to anyone, nor was it ever mentioned among my father's people in Scotland where I went for holidays. When I went to Ottawa for the first time with my husband, I became self-conscious about it. It embarrassed him. In those days there was a gulf as wide as the ocean between the east and the west. But even then I did not worry about it, in connection with our children. But I should have been aware of the danger, guarded against it, protected them from their heritage."

"You are talking a lot of nonsense," said Gwen, calmly. "Shall we ring for Annie and have more coffee while we smoke? I like to see Annie about. How you gathered these queer characters, George, Wong, Annie, around you, I can't imagine. Brooke came in full of enthusiasm about George. He says that he learned more of the political set up in Canada and the United States talking to him, than he had learned

from top politicians with whom he had spoken on this trip. George told Brooke that you and his mother had been girlhood friends."

"Yes, indeed, and we are still good friends. My father was luckier than hers, as was my husband, but we are both old timers, as we call it, and that is a close bond. There is nothing of the family retainer relationship between George's family and the MacKenzie family, as there would be in England. His mother comes to my home, a welcome guest. George and I are friends."

The English woman shook her head in bewilderment. "It is a different world isn't it?"

"It was," agreed Margot. "Now, of course, it is changing rapidly. American oil people are coming in, Eastern firms opened up here, and sent out their executives. The new society has different standards as is evidenced by the fact that people like Jack Steele and his wife are in it. Money means a great deal more now than it did then, but the old timers still stick together. Some of them are still rich, some, like our family, have been rich, and are now poor, and some of them, through their entire lives, have never been more than one jump ahead of the sheriff, but we are old timers, and that is enough."

"Speaking of Mr. Steele, what happened last night?"

Lady MacKenzie sighed. "It was not easy, Gwen."

There was a knock at the door, and Annie entered with the coffee. Lady Denton looked at her with interest. There was no subservience about Annie. As she handed a cup to the English woman she said:

"So you are going this afternoon? I'm really sorry. We have all enjoyed having you people. Wong hopes that you will come again, very soon, and that just shows. Lady MacKenzie will miss you when you have gone."

"And we shall miss every one of you," said Lady Denton warmly. "Our visit has been a very wonderful experience. We are hoping to have your mistress pay us a return visit shortly. You will have to come along."

She wondered what effect Annie would have on her own servants, becoming more difficult every day, as they struggled awkwardly to assert a new independence. Perhaps this woman could teach them something of the dignity of assistance without subservience. She had heard Lady MacKenzie on several occasions speak of her "help," not her servants. Perhaps the word was significant.

"Goodness, yes," Annie broke in on her thoughts. "I couldn't let her go gallivanting about without me. And Lady Denton," she went on impressively. "You tell her not to worry. George and I think she has done the right thing." She walked out of the room with dignity.

Gwen's eyes followed her. "Does it shock you?" smiled Margot. Gwen shook her head.

"No, I like it. Of course, we have a somewhat similar situation with our old nannies and housekeepers. They are usually pensioned off, and we are fond of them, but it is not the same at this. As for the rest of our servants, they are just cogs in our well-oiled household machinery. True, some of them have come from the same families for generations, we have one or two like that at our country place. You would think the business of the farmer and his wife was to breed servants for us. Of course the war has changed that. The young men and women went into the services, or into munitions. They look upon us, perhaps correctly, as cumberers of the earth. And why should they devote their lives to the service of a family at ridiculously low wages, when they can devote themselves to the services of their country at decent wages? Once the war was over, they had learned what they are worth." The woman looked puzzled as she put down her cup. "Margot, I am all at sixes and sevens since I have come to the Bar X."

Her companion laughed. "Isn't the whole world, Gwen? Don't worry about what the English people are doing. As always, you will give leadership, though you are poor, and comparatively weak, because, compared to so many other countries, you are sane. As for your Labour Government, I think the election of that saved Western Europe from going

Communist. England showed that there was a middle of the road that could be followed. Too many men of good will were losing their way, and being lured into the Communist camp, or the fascist group. The English sense of compromise may save us all.

"What worries me, is my lack of knowledge of the meaning of terms. We use words too loosely. For instance, is your government a socialist government or a labour government, or is it trying to be both? If so, it may fall between two stools. As I see it, labour is primarily concerned with production, and inclined to let consumption take care of itself. Socialism, as I always thought, was chiefly concerned with consumption, knowing that if consumption kept up, so would production. Is your government with its strong trade union representation cancelling itself out?"

Gwen looked at her friend with interest. "As I said, Margot, I am mixed up. When I stepped on the boat to come over here, I was a confirmed Tory. My class, despite wars and depressions, led a good life, and I was determined that no more concessions should be made than were necessary to maintain as much of that life as possible. I sincerely believed that the voting into power of the present Government was just the result of our party having blundered into a war. We were the educated, politically experienced class that could give the people what was good for them, and better for us. Now, my sense of honesty will not let me blame a party for difficulties caused by conditions that the old time parties allowed to happen. We have had two Labour governments, and each one has had to take over a mess which occurred when the conservative elements in the country were in power. Then we blame them because they cannot perform miracles.

"I suppose that there is a difference between Labour and Socialism. I don't know. Perhaps the government does not know either. That may be its weakness. But I am going back to put my money and Brooke's brains to work to help that Government. What I have seen in the United States has troubled me. I saw the most powerful nation in the world in a fit of hysteria, becoming fascist. I was troubled by the

ignorance of so many people in high places with regard to other countries, and the problems of those countries. As for what has caused these problems, they seemed to have no idea about that at all. Some of their broadcasts and newspaper articles were fantastic, and most misleading.

"The few sons and daughters in their teens, of people who entertained us, were, almost without exception, remarkably silly, and displayed a most embarrassing and painful exuberance of conduct. I thought that their exhibitionism was symptomatic, and *that* generation will soon be taking over. The same generation of Russians are not, by our standards normal. Perhaps the Russians have never been normal. How, then, can such peoples resolve their differences by reason and compromise? I feel that if England goes under, the greatest stabilizing influence in the world has gone. For that reason, we should forget our internal differences, and help the Government. It is too late to enjoy family rows."

Gwen Denton leaned over and took a cigarette from the box on the table. She lit it, and leaning back, slowly exhaled the smoke. "Speaking of family rows," she smiled, "We have wandered far afield. What happened last night?"

"It seems very petty, when we think of this troubled world, doesn't it?" Margot said. She then told of the family meeting at Trevor's.

"I am so pleased that you carried it through. I am sure that you have done the right thing."

"It was the hardest thing I ever did," admitted the other. "When Janet stormed out of the room, I thought I could not bear it. Yet, oddly enough, it was Arthur who almost broke my resolution. He was so unexpectedly sweet to me."

"So often if one is resolute in doing the right thing, one finds that matters work out better than if one had done the wrong thing for expediency's sake. Now, Arthur, will be taken care of by Nancy, and they will both be happier than they have ever been before. I suppose that Janet is sulking in her tent. She did not join us at breakfast."

Margot looked at her friend, her dark eyes full of pain. "Janet, I am afraid, has gone over to the enemy. She took

the car last night, and, I suppose, drove into the city. When Annie told me, just before breakfast, that she had not been in her room, and had taken the car, I had her telephone the house. She was not there. Gwen, what will happen to that girl? I have seen Janet in these moods before. She imagines that we are all against her, thwarting her, and then she takes the bit in her teeth. One result of such a mood was her second husband. That did not turn out as badly as it might have done. This time, I am afraid that she has gone to Jack Steele. Trevor says that he will not divorce his wife, and marry her, that he is in need of money, and his wife still has some. He knows that Janet has nothing.

"I fear all sorts of things for her. With her beauty and restlessness, she could so easily become just a tramp about Europe, which seems to be where she wants to go, climbing a little at first, then slipping, as she faded. You and I have seen those pitiful women. Let Annie bring us a drink, Gwen. I promised Trevor that I would not drink alone anymore, but I know that he would not mind my having one with you. I don't see how I can get through this day, beaming on Ian and Constance, smiling my happiness at Trevor, showing Arthur my joy at his co-operation, and saying good-bye to you unless I have something to pull me out of this slough of despond."

As Gwen looked at the small dark woman opposite, she did not know whether to envy her or pity her. She had so many people whom she loved, while she herself had only Brooke, who, she was sure, cared not at all. Yet love brought so much suffering with it; the only suffering of the spirit. She sat swinging her glasses on their black ribbon, and tears started to her eyes, but for which one of them, she did not know.

"Poor dear, of course you need something, and so do I. One comfort about Annie is that she will not be far away, and we shall have our drinks in a minute, before we have time to get soppy and upset. Annie is like George—omnipresent. She may be setting the luncheon table this very minute, and yet, miraculously, she will be right here too. The most remarkable people at this houseparty are Wong, George and Annie."

There was a knock at the door. "Come in," called Lady MacKenzie.

Annie put her head around the door. "Excuse me, Lady MacKenzie," she said in her nasal voice. "I was just wondering if you and Lady Denton wanted anything."

Both women laughed. "Annie, where were you?" asked her mistress.

"I just happened to be coming along the hall and wondered if you wanted anything." She answered in an aggrieved voice.

"Well, you came just in time. We do want something. It's a bit early, I know, but we each want a drink of Scotch and soda, cold, with the glasses nicely frosted."

Annie frowned, then looked at Lady Denton, and her face wrinkled up happily. "I'll get them right away," she said, and closed the door.

Lady MacKenzie smiled, and shrugged her shoulders. "You see, Gwen, you are so respectable."

"Respectable!" snorted the other woman, jabbing her glasses on her nose. "I have never been anything else. For years I have been absolutely sick and tired of my respectability, and yet I could never get away from it. I am afraid that it has made me a very dull and tiresome person. Even though I fell madly in love with Brooke the first time I saw him, not even he, ever dreamed that I had married him for anything but the most respectable reason—to make a good Tory politician out of him. If I helped a tenant because my heart bled for him in his trouble, it was taken for granted that I did it solely because I was the Lady of the Manor, and it was my duty. When I maintained my friendship with my cousin Constance, none of my friends thought that it was because I was very fond of the girl, and could understand how passion can drive a man or a woman; they thought that I was too much of a lady to show my feelings."

Annie knocked and entered with the tray. As she set it down, she warned them. "Wong says that lunch is to be served at one-thirty sharp, Lady MacKenzie. He must be making something very special for dessert, because he is in a

terrible temper, and won't let anyone into the kitchen. He even says that he is going back to China."

"Dear, dear," smiled Margot MacKenzie. "It *must* be something very special. For more years than I like to remember," she explained to Lady Denton, "Wong has threatened periodically to go home to China, and the result has always been something extra good. Tell him," she said turning to Annie, "that we shall not fail him. Luncheon at one-thirty."

The telephone shrilled, and Lady MacKenzie lifted the receiver. That smile, like rippling sunshine, passed over her face. She covered the mouthpiece with her small brown hand. "It's Janet!" she whispered.

"Tell her to meet us at the hotel at half past seven for dinner," Gwen whispered back. "Make her come."

Janet's mother relayed the message, spoke for a moment or two, then hung up, turning to her friend, a bewildered expression on her face. "She sounded perfectly normal," she cried in amazement. "She said that she would be very happy to dine with you."

Gwen was scarcely listening to her. She was sitting back in the chintz chair, furiously swinging her glasses. "Margot, I don't know why I have not thought of this before. I have just had a splendid idea. You say that Janet's one desire is to get away. Very well, she will go as hostess on one of these cruises that are arranged. Dreadful things, it seems to me, being led in a herd about the world, but many people seem to like them."

"But how could she get such a post?"

"Just now, I don't know, but it can be arranged. I have a brother in shipping. As a matter of fact, quite a bit of the family money is in shipping, worse luck. I shall cable him." She reached for the telephone book.

"Just a minute, Gwen," protested Margot. "It is a wonderful idea. The perfect solution, but I must be fair. You don't know Janet."

"I think that I do, my dear. You forget that Janet has had a frightening experience, for the first time. Her security has been threatened. That is a great factor in making people

reasonable. Your daughter will behave herself, now that she has learned that she cannot always count on you to see her out of her dilemmas."

She ran a finger down a column in the telephone book and lifting the receiver, dictated a cable. Margot watched with wonder and admiration at such efficiency. She, herself would have taken several days to think about it. With such a wife, no wonder Sir Brooke had achieved political success.

Chapter Fourteen

WHEN Janet left Trevor's house, she gathered up her long green skirts, and ran out of the gate towards the bunkhouse where George slept. The moon and the Northern Lights lit her way. As she reached the door, George was turning the corner of the house.

"Miss Janet," he exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"George, I want the keys of the small car," she said breathlessly. "Please hurry."

"Did Lady MacKenzie say that you were to have them?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, George, I am not a child. I'm going for a drive."

George plunged his hand into his pocket, and then changed his mind. "I'll go over to the garage and take it out for you."

As they crossed the yard, the man glanced sideways at his companion. "A good-looker, all right," he thought, "If you like the type, but not my dish at all. I wonder what she is up to?"

Janet was startlingly beautiful in the moonlight. Her face and throat were flower-like, in their deep, creamy texture. Her wide scarlet mouth, with its tightly pressed lips, was a dark line across her face. Her green eyes, ablaze with anger, were as luminous as a cat's.

"How is your mother, George?" she asked, trying to make her voice sound casual. The fool might still get difficult about the car.

"She's just fair. Keeps poked up in that one room she lives in too much."

"She should go out, George. She should make herself go out every day."

"That is what I tell her, but she hates the city. She used to walk a lot when she had that little place on the outskirts of town."

"Perhaps you can get another place like that for her now. I hear that you have been offered a job at the armouries. When do you start work?" she asked.

"I haven't made up my mind yet, whether I'll take it or not."

"Then you had better do so at once," Janet said sharply. "Jobs don't grow on bushes."

The man looked at her with annoyance. "There are still plenty of jobs to be had," he said shortly.

"And there are still plenty of chances that we shall have another depression," Janet reminded him. "You men in the services were so well looked after, that you forget a time may come when you won't be handed everything on a silver platter."

"Perhaps," agreed the man, "and again perhaps the men who fought the war are as well able to look after themselves as those who stayed at home. Not that I would question for a moment which ones had the softest time," he added sarcastically.

"Well, if you will take a tip from me, you will grab that job, for I'm sure that my mother will not be able to keep you on much longer. Mr. Steele went to a great deal of trouble to get that place for you."

"That's right," George said softly. "And he is not a man who likes his favours thrown back at him. Well, I'll think about it."

He slid the garage doors back, and brought out the car.

"There are about five gallons in her, but she is using up a lot," he cautioned, sliding from under the wheel. "Don't bother putting her away. I'll look after it in the morning."

Janet jumped in, and grinding the gears in her haste to be off, shot across the yard to the open gate. George stood looking after her—saw the water shower about the car like a fountain of silver as she crossed the ford, and watched the red light climbing the hill on the other side, until it topped the rise, and was gone.

He shrugged and went home to bed. He had had to give her the keys. She looked as if she was in a mood to do anything short of mayhem to get them. And was she mad! And no wonder. He chuckled to himself as he entered the bunkhouse.

Janet drove through the night. The moon set, and she was alone in the vast land, only the lights of the car making a bright tunnel through the darkness. At first she hardly knew what she planned to do. Her only thought at Trevor's had been to get away from all of them who seemed to her intent on her destruction. This was her first defeat in the family, and rage killed thought. She would show them! If this was the way her mother wanted it, very well, but she would regret it. She would go to Jack Steele. Together they would get some place in the world. He would be only too glad to divorce that common little wife of his, and marry her. At least Ottawa would be better than this hole.

She began to picture what she would make of her life. Jack belonged to the right party. That was a good start. She, as the daughter of her father, would be able to open doors in the capital which had hitherto been closed to him. She might even be able to wangle a place for him in the diplomatic service. This picture became as attractive to her as the one of visiting Sir Brooke and Lady Denton had seemed earlier. "I'll entertain them when we get abroad," she thought grimly, "and I won't be in moccasins and feathers when I do it, either. The impertinence of them. I never did like them." And yet she had to smile when she remembered how quickly and accurately

she and Sir Brooke had taken each other's measure. They had known at once that they were both receivers, not givers, so had nothing for each other.

Janet slowed the car from the seventy she had been driving, as she entered the city. It was well after two, and as she drove through the business section, it had the tawdry look of all small cities in the small hours of the morning, when they try to cater to late revelers, with inadequate means. She passed small groups of people coming out of eating places, some still gay, the majority showing the wrinkled, white-faced weariness of drinks no longer potent. She turned up a tree-lined street, and pulled up in front of Jack Steele's imposing house. The place, as she had expected, was in darkness. She turned off the car, and tip-toed up the walk. Crossing the wide porch, she searched for the bell, and pressed, keeping her finger on it. She could hear it ringing in the back of the house, but no lights came on, and she remembered that since Jack's wife had gone away, only a woman came in by the day to look after the place.

She stopped ringing, and went down the steps, turning and looking to see if there were any windows open, resolving that if Jack were out, she would sit in the car until he came home. Curtains were fluttering in a faint breeze, through an open window. She mounted the steps and again pressed the bell.

At last a light came on in the upstairs hall, and then downstairs. Jack, in his pyjamas, came down tying his gown about him. As he neared the door, Janet tapped on the glass, and spoke his name softly. He hurriedly unlocked the door and drew her inside.

"For God's sake!" he cried in consternation. "Of all the fool things!" He led the way to the library, and turning on the lights, crossed the room quickly and drew the curtains.

Janet stood by the door, her teeth chattering, "I'm frozen, Jack. Light the fire."

He stooped and put a match to the gas grate, and then rose, rubbing his heavy face with his hand, and moving his head as if trying to shake the sleep from his eyes. Janet moved over to the fire, and stooping held her hands out to the warmth. She looked up at him, smiling, her eyes full of invitation, as

she thought that he certainly did not look his best at the moment. The man's blood began to pound. What a devil she was. The glow from the fire gave a warmth to her neck and shoulders, stemming out of her green dress. Looking down at her, the man thought that whatever posture her long slender figure took, it seemed to be more graceful than the one that had preceded it. How many women could crouch by a fire and look like that?

His eyes dwelt on her slim arms, in their long, tight sleeves, on the exquisite line of her slender thighs, to which her soft gown clung. Then he pulled himself together. Oh, no. Not Jack Steele. He had gambled that Janet could pull a deal for him, and she had failed. Now he would cut his losses, which included Janet. There was no place for her in the new plans he was making.

"I'll get the drinks," he mumbled, and left the room. He returned carrying a tray, with glasses and a decanter which he put on a low table in front of the fire, then drew up an easy chair and sat down. He poured the drinks in silence, and the woman watched him, puzzled. This was not the reception she had expected. The man was stupid with sleep. A drink would awaken him.

"Well, what gives? Have you been talking to your mother again?" he asked coldly.

Janet pondered whether she would be more effective sitting on the arm of his chair, or facing him across the fire, and decided on the latter. She sat down on a fireside stool, and smiled at him over the rim of her glass.

"Glad to see me?" she asked softly.

So she had not been able to pull it. Well, that was that, now, the sooner he got her out of the house, the better. Now he would need every last cent he could get from his wife.

"It's a hell of an hour to see anyone," he grumbled. "I asked you. What gives?"

A flame of anger shot through Janet, but she controlled herself.

"Jack," she said softly, throwing back her fur coat, and leaning towards him. "I have just come from a meeting of

the clan at Trevor's place. I am through with every one of them and to whom would I come, darling, but you. I told them that I would."

"Why?"

The girl looked at him in angry amazement, then shrugged her beautiful shoulders.

"Because you said that you wanted your wife to divorce you, so that you could marry me. Remember? Because only last week you urged me to give you my promise that as soon as this oil deal was settled, and you had bought the leases up North I would go away with you, for only in that way would your wife's pride force her to sue for a divorce. Well, I have come. I am ready to do as you asked."

With hands that shook, Jack Steele lit a cigarette for himself and Janet, then spoke.

"Listen, Janet. That oil business is not settled, is it? It hasn't even started. I had your mother almost talked into it that day Dick Watson was out with me. Then you were so sure that you and Arthur could handle it better, that I turned the business over to you. Now, all that I can say is that you have made a damned mess of it. Without the money I could have made from the stock, I couldn't buy an acre up North. And without the money I had hoped to make out of those northern fields, I couldn't take you as far as the next village. The whole thing is washed up, and our little affair with it. If I can't get into the oil game, I shall have to stick to politics until I can get some money. Can you picture me in Ottawa with a woman who has been twice divorced, and for whom I had divorced my own wife? Oh, no." He raised his glass and drained it. "Not in Canadian politics, my girl. You know, as well as I do, that your own father might have been Prime Minister if he had handled his domestic affairs better."

While the man was speaking, the blood drained from Janet's face, and her eyes were mere slits of rage. Now she knew the surging hate that caused women to kill men. That he, Jack Steele, this cheap opportunist, would dare to speak thus to Janet MacKenzie. She sat and stared into the fire, hugging

her knees. The over-ornate clock on the mantel seemed to wake up, and stress each bitter second by its loud ticking. At length, Janet rose, gathering her coat around her.

"I'd like to kill you, Jack," she said softly, looking down at him. "But that would be too easy for you; it would be all over for you, and I would be the one to suffer, but if it is the last thing I do, I'll shove you back into your proper place as a cheap shyster in a small western city."

The man rose awkwardly to his feet. "Don't come to the door," the girl said quickly. "I shall let myself out. And remember what I have said I shall do."

"Janet, be reasonable."

She looked at him scornfully. This time she was not faking that dignity of her mother's.

"I think that I am being very reasonable," she smiled. "You are out of your proper place in your present position. I am merely going to put you back where you belong, and you will be much happier." She turned and left the room. The man sat down heavily, a frown between his eyes. The girl was a devil. She might do something at that. Then his brow cleared. The MacKenzies' days were over in the Province along with a good many other families who had thought they could run the place forever. Today was the day of Jack and his kind, and he knew it. "Shove me back where I belong," he snorted, and poured another drink.

Janet ran down the steps and into her car. Now what? She pounded her clenched fist against the wheel and hated everyone. Jack, her mother, Trevor, those wretched English people, all had deserted her. All had their hands turned against her. She felt as if she were alone in the world, and she was frightened. She drove aimlessly about the streets, dreading to go home. Finding a coffee counter open, she went in and had hamburgers and coffee. She felt better after that, and half smiled as she thought of her mother's saying, in every crisis. "After all, one always has one's stomach!" Several people in the place glanced curiously at her in her expensive clothes. She could hear them saying within the next few days, "Oh, that's Janet MacKenzie. Jack Steele

gave her a rush for a while, but soon threw her over." She paid the cheque and hurried out. Where could she go now? She dreaded going home, after the way she had talked at Trevor's.

The party at the Ranch was breaking up tomorrow, today, in fact. Already a grey light was appearing in the east. Arthur and her mother might be coming in from the Ranch with their guests. The girl's shoulders sagged with exhaustion. She wished that her first husband were with her, to comfort her, as he used to do. She had not thought of him for months—that nice boy, who had wearied her with his love, as she had wearied him with her demands. Turning into the street in which she lived she swung the car through the gates and pulled up at the door. Quietly letting herself into the house, she tiptoed into her room, and flinging off her clothes, tumbled into bed. "I dare not think," she whispered to herself in the dark. "Oh, dear God, keep me from thinking. Let me sleep, let me sleep!" Immediately she fell into deep slumber.

It was late when Janet awoke in the morning, and she lay for a moment comfortably thinking of how hungry she was and what she would have the maid bring up for breakfast. Then last night's scene with Jack flashed into her mind, and she could feel her whole body blush with the shame of it. She turned over and pressed her face into the pillow and bit savagely at her knuckles to keep from crying. Not only had everyone else failed her, but she had failed herself. Last night's scene should have at least ended on an epic note, and what had really happened. She had flounced out, uttering hollow threats, and come home to bed, and awakened feeling hungry. She would have been happier had she been the heroine in a tragedy. Instead, she had made a fool of herself in what appeared to be dangerously near to a cheap situation.

She had often made a fool of herself before, but someone else had always had to suffer for it. Now the suffering was all hers. She had told the family that she was going away

with Jack Steele, and now they would know that he would not have her. Trust Ian and Trevor for that. She sat up and furiously rang the bell at her bedside. The maid came in, amazed to find Janet there.

"We had no idea, cook and I, that you were here, Miss Janet. Lady MacKenzie telephoned about nine, and I told her that you were not here. You had not rung for breakfast, so we never dreamed."

"The fact that my mother telephoned should have made it clear to you that I was home," Janet said sharply. "However, I shall call her in a few minutes. Turn on the bath water, please, and then bring me up some fruit juice, bacon and eggs, toast, marmalade and coffee."

The girl sullenly prepared the bath. She and cook had planned to attend an afternoon show and be back before the family arrived from the Ranch for dinner. That Miss Janet was more bother than all the rest of the family put together. She left the room and went down to give the order to the cook.

"What the dickens is the matter with her this morning?" said the cook. "She never eats a decent breakfast, she's that careful of her figure. She'd be better natured if she ate more."

"I know," said Doris dryly, for she also watched her weight anxiously. "You have said it all before. If people don't keep their appetite satisfied, they are apt to get strange urges. Well, what I say is that if we don't keep our weight down it is no use having urges." She flounced about getting the tray ready.

Janet hurried with her bath and settled in bed again. "Well," she thought with satisfaction, "at least mother is worried. She need not be. Here is dear Jenny, safe at home in her own little bed." She felt a sense of compunction, but fought it down. All that she had to do was to raise the receiver from the telephone at her elbow and her mother would stop worrying about her. But what could she say? She could see Trevor's grin when he was told that Janet was

at home. If only she could have said to her mother, "I am leaving at once, mother. I shall write you and tell you all about it."

She ate her breakfast thinking of the drab days ahead, living out her empty life in a small city, her beauty fading, fewer and fewer parties, less and less attention given her at them. Then the little parties at which there were only women, where the "Girls" drank and played bridge, and gossiped, and at last the parties of four old women gathered about a card table in the afternoon; four scrawny old women, and she one of them, haggling over a "fortieth."

Her hands shook as she lit a cigarette. What had happened? What evil spirit, what Imp, as her mother would have called it, had come into her life to wreck it, just as she was thinking that things were going to be better? Only yesterday she had scorned the thought of being in Paris with Jack Steele, and had pictured herself the guest of Sir Brooke and Lady Denton in England. Only last night she had renounced this dream, but had seen herself the wife of a diplomat in London. Now she could only see herself as an old woman playing a dreary game of bridge, for where was there an unmarried man in this small city who could give her enough to compensate her for marrying him?

She raised her cup, then paused with it halfway to her lips and set it down quickly. Her eyes widened, and her mouth opened in horror. She would not even be that dreadful old woman. The house would have to be sold. She would be out on the Ranch, an old auntie to Ian's bawling youngsters, helping with the housework, snowed in for days, no one to notice her, drying up in the sunbaked land of summer, watching with disdain the fecund life of Ian's home and farm. She pressed her long, slender brown fingers over her eyes, holding back tears of self-pity that welled up in them. Impatiently she shoved the tray away and reached for the telephone.

When the connection was made she heard her mother's voice.

"Is that you, Janet darling? I am so glad that you have called us."

"Yes, Mother," she answered, her low, slightly husky voice well under control. "Doris said that you called earlier. Sorry I am so late in getting in touch with you. I slept in, and the stupid creature did not know I was here, because I was not prancing about at eight o'clock. What's that?"

"Nothing, darling," she heard her mother say. "Gwen is here with me, and I just told her that you were on the phone."

"Oh," said Janet coldly. "Does she want to speak to me?"

"No, no," her mother answered hurriedly.

"Did you want me for anything special, darling? I am still in bed, but it is a glorious day, so I am going out to the club for a game of golf. I am in a bit of a rush."

Her mother did not answer for a moment or two, and she could hear a conversation going on at the other end of the line. A sharp frown appeared between the girl's fine black brows, which she quickly smoothed out with her finger.

"Mother," she cried sharply. "Are you there?"

"Yes, dear," her mother said quickly. "I wanted to tell you that Arthur and I are saying out here for a few days. Sir Brooke and Lady Denton and Constance will be leaving here about four, and would like you to have dinner with them at the hotel this evening. I do hope that you can manage it." There was urgency in her mother's voice.

"That sounds delightful, Mother," said Janet. "Will you tell them that I shall be at the hotel about seven-thirty and shall call their suite."

"Oh, Jenny, darling, that is splendid." Her mother's voice broke, and she could say no more.

"Good-bye, Mother, I have to hurry now or I shall never get out to that golf game," finished Janet, and hung up.

She sat up against the pillows, staring straight in front of her. Here was a gleam of light. She did not know how she would use this opportunity, but she must do something about it. Her thoughts, of course, were on Sir Brooke. The Janets of the world do not look to women for help.

She spent the afternoon selecting her clothes for the evening, resting, repairing the ravages of the past hours, and when

she entered the rotunda of the hotel she knew that she had every reason to be satisfied with her appearance. She had dressed her gleaming black hair in a simple knot at the nape of her neck, and wore the emerald earrings, an heirloom which her mother had given her. Her white crepe dinner dress with a green jewelled belt gave her an unexpectedly pathetic look, as if her beauty had been too much for her purity. She had worried a little about that dress. Sir Brooke would either succumb to its effect or be amused by it, but she thought that it was worth the risk. When she rang their suite, Sir Brooke answered.

"Janet," he cried heartily. "How splendid to hear your voice. We are dining up here. Thought it would be cosier. I shall be right down for you."

"Don't bother, please. I'll come up."

When she tapped on their door Brooke threw it open and welcomed her with both hands. "We are so glad that you could come, Janet," he said heartily. He hovered over her, helping her with her wrap, calling to Gwen and Constance that she had arrived, and every attention this handsome and charming man showered on her restored more and more her shattered morale. She smiled at him.

"I suppose you know," he said softly, "that for your type you are the most beautiful woman in the world, and how exactly right that dress is for you!" They both laughed.

Janet grinned impishly. "I like this for certain rôles," she said. "And I shall always regret that I am not your type."

"It could be that you are," he smiled, his grey eyes aglow with admiration, and thought to himself, "Here I go again."

Gwen came in dressed in a brown lace dinner gown, which did nothing for her but kill her fine eyes, followed by Constance, beautiful as an angel in a soft blue dress. "Wouldn't she?" thought Janet with derision. "So obviously 'her colour.' She will be far better off married to Ian, talking about horses, cows and babies, than tagging after this man."

"So pleased to see you again, Janet. We were afraid that we might have to go without seeing you," said Gwen.

"Constance and I have just been attacking the letters that have accumulated. Brooke, will you look after the cocktails?"

They settled themselves about the room. "You look very lovely, Janet," she continued in her direct way. "I thought that green was quite stunning on you, but now that I see you in white, I think that you are even more beautiful in that. I try to persuade Constance to wear blue all the time. Her eyes, you know, and that skin and golden hair. As for me, I always say that a plain woman should stick to inconspicuous colours, then she can fade into the background so easily—become part of the walls, as it were."

They laughed, and Sir Brooke passed the drinks. "I have ordered dinner, but have told them that we are not in a hurry," he said. "We have hours before us, and we must make the most of them. Having you with us tonight, Janet, makes the break from the Ranch easier. I think that each one of us had a wrench in our hearts when we left. We had a wonderful time out there."

"Almost a mystic experience," said Gwen quietly. Her three companions turned and looked at her.

"A *mystic* experience?" cried Janet, her eyes hard.

"Yes, Jenny dear, if I may call you Jenny, as your mother does. I do not know what caused it, but there were forces at work. Every one at the little house party has had his life changed. Some found happiness, some did not, but I think that we have all gained from it. Two families, strangers to each other, from opposite sides of the world, meet, and not one will ever be quite the same again. That experience has forged a link between us, a link strengthened by Ian and Constance. We shall always feel close to one another, and for that I am very grateful."

The small, energetic woman drained her glass, a thing she had never before done in her life, and the others did likewise. Brooke stood looking down at his wife, a strange expression on his face. He felt that he had never known her before. He had thought of her as a rich, ambitious, clever woman, whose goodness and fine character he had greatly admired,

and who was always and most annoyingly right. He saw her now as someone humble, lonely, seeking understanding, as he himself had sought it, doing what she had done, not for herself, but for him.

Lady Denton met her husband's eyes and smiled with embarrassment. "Brooke, I think that we should have another drink. We have become quite solemn."

Janet turned to Constance. "I think that you have made the *greatest* change." She smiled. "You are one of the party who has found happiness. My brother is a very lucky man."

"Yes, I think that I have," said Constance, smiling warmly at Janet. "I am a very ordinary person, whose way has fallen among people who are so learned and clever that I have been half frightened of them. I have tried so desperately to keep up with them. I have loved and admired them; who would not? But now I think that I have found my right place. I fell in love with the Ranch the first time I saw it, the house nestled among the hills like a big brown animal, its wings like two great paws pressed against the bank of the river. As for Ian and me, I think that his nature is as simple as mine. We do not feel that we have to impress each other. And I am so glad for all the advantages that Gwen and Brooke have given me. It will keep us from becoming stodgy and dull. I think that we can make a good life."

Brooke was busying himself at the table, shaking up the cocktails. Gwen looked at the girl with respect. "You are not making a mistake, Constance. I think that as Arthur would say, 'You have found your place.'"

Brooke turned. "Again we are getting serious. A drink is called for. Then I shall order up the dinner. I had quite a time persuading the chap that I did not want cold storage turkey or chicken when I was in Alberta, famous for its beef. We have had nothing else across Canada, Janet, until we met your mother." He smiled.

Lady Denton rose, holding her glass in her hand. "Jenny, will you excuse Constance and me for a few minutes? We have some cables which we must send. As you may imagine, a dozen things have come up demanding attention, and I

know that Brooke and Constance will have no time to look after these things before train time in the morning."

Janet assured her hostess that she would not mind at all. Brooke came over and sat beside her on the sofa. Silently they toasted each other, then broke into laughter.

"It just won't work, will it, Brooke?" smiled the girl.

"And I don't know why," Brooke said, puzzled.

"Nor I," grinned Janet. "We should by all the rules fall head over heels in love with each other. You have everything that I most desire in a man, brain, looks, position, money. And men have not found me uninteresting."

"And we have a common ground for sympathetic understanding. You and I were two who did not find happiness at the Ranch, when it was being served out in such lavish measures. I have some idea, my dear, of how great your disappointment must have been at your mother's decision."

Janet sipped her drink, and then slowly nodded her head.

"Yes, Brooke, things went badly for me. I know that they did not go well for you, either, but Constance is right. She is much better suited to Ian than to you. She loved you, but she was not being herself with you. You have your life, with all its interest and importance. What mother has done in refusing to sell the Ranch has left me utterly bereft. Can you picture me living on the Ranch with Constance and Ian?" her lips smiled contemptuously.

"I think that that is why my wife left us alone, Jenny. She wanted me to talk you about your future. Gwen, you know, is quite an amazing person, with a most astounding collection of relatives. When she wants something done, she calls on them and it is done. To a poor man, without influence, as I once was, this close knit co-operation of the privileged class in England was a source of never-ceasing wonder."

"What did your wife want you to talk to me about?" asked Janet curiously.

Brooke leaned forward, twirling his glass in his hand. "Your mother is worried about you, Jenny. She realizes that you are more or less side-tracked in the small western

city. Your education abroad, the time you have spent in England and on the continent have not fitted you for it. She spoke of this to Gwen, who suggested that you might like to take a position as hostess on one of the large liners. They have these cruises, you know. I think that the idea has possibilities."

He looked at her and smiled that knowing smile which they had so often exchanged in the past few days. "Gwen thinks that, because of your background, it would be an ideal post for you. I think that you would meet dozens of eligible men, interesting men, with money and position. My dear, you must get settled. You are much too restless and beautiful to be going about at large."

Janet put her drink on the table while Brooke was speaking, and when he finished she sat very still. The man was troubled, wondering if, despite their mutual understanding of one another, he had said too much.

"Well, Jenny?" he asked softly.

The girl turned to him, her eyes glowing. To get away, to travel, to meet people! She drew a long breath.

"It would be heaven, Brooke. For the first time in my life I realize something splendid has happened to me, that I know I do not deserve. I have always taken my blessings so much for granted. This morning life seemed so hopeless to me that I wanted to die. But how does one go about getting such a position? I know that you would not have mentioned it to me if you had not something fairly definite in mind."

Brooke laughed. "Need I say that Gwen has relatives in the shipping business? As a matter of fact, they are her brothers. There will be no worry about you getting the position. All that she had to do was to send a cable. She even has a very good idea of the boat you will be on. She has everything arranged, even to the date you will sail. When Gwen 'takes steps,' things happen, and she is, if you are willing, taking steps."

Janet shivered with excitement. "Brooke, I can't believe it. The date I sail. Think of it. Oh, Brooke, I am so

happy, so relieved, I think that I am going to cry, and I *never* cry."

"Don't do that!" he cried. "Here is a cigarette."

There was a knock at the door, and the waiters came in with dinner. Sir Brooke went to the bedroom and called Gwen and Constance. He nodded his head to his wife as she passed through the door, indicating Janet's acceptance of her plan, then with an adroit movement he slipped into the room intercepting Constance. He stepped to one side, drawing her softly to him, pressing his lips against the soft hollow of her throat. For a brief moment they clung together, with a brief upsurging of their passion, then sedately walked into the sitting room. Brooke's eyes were troubled. What was the matter with Constance? She was troubled and unhappy, he knew. Others might not notice it, but he knew her too well to have her deceive him. And yet he knew that she did not love him. That also he knew her too well to be deceived about. What then was the trouble?

Chapter Fifteen

BROOKE closed the last bag in their room at the hotel in Vancouver, and straightening up his long body, said to his wife, who was watching him from her chair, "Well, my dear, that is the lot. It has been quite a trip, hasn't it?"

She smiled up at him. "It has indeed. The last part has been particularly good. You certainly cannot complain that you have been talking to half empty houses in British Columbia. I think that it was the question hour at the last that drew the people. You certainly went 'all out,' as they say over here. I think that is what drew the crowds."

"I was just warming up for my return home, Gwen. I have arrived at what I want to do when I get there." He moved over to the window and stood looking out. The rain was pounding in sheets down the pane and heavy clouds hung over the mountains across the bay. "A beautiful city, beautifully situated, but what a climate! We have had rain every day."

Gwen laughed. "We are from England, you know. We should not be allergic to rain. They tell me that this is their worst season."

"Perhaps. But I am sure that the weather must be pretty bad. Everyone is so weather conscious. They keep insisting so emphatically that this wet weather is exceptional."

He stood at the window, drumming on the glass. Grey hairs were beginning to show at his temples, which only accentuated his good looks, but this morning his face was set in stern lines and his eyes were unhappy. Gwen, her heart aching for him, went over and put her hand timidly on his arm. For a moment or two they stood side by side in silence. Then Gwen spoke.

"Brooke, I hardly know how to say this. I am not happy about you and Constance. I have been watching the girl and her manner puzzles and worries me. One thing I want to make clear to you. If you and Constance think that your happiness depends on being together, I shall not stand in your way. Her resolve to stay in Canada and marry Ian may have been nothing but an idea that, by doing so, she could straighten out the tangle of our three lives. Believe me, Brooke, I am determined that the rest of your life is yours to live as you want it. If that includes Constance, well and good."

Brooke looked down at his wife with a tender smile, and his fingers closed over the hand on his arm. "Gwen, I want to tell you this. I have loved Constance, as you know. What may surprise you, is that I have loved you also. A man could not live with a woman of your fine character and kindliness, your generosity and understanding, and remain indifferent to it. 'I have been faithful to you, Cynara, after my fashion.' Not a very good fashion, I admit, but there it is."

His wife looked up at him, tears in her eyes. "Brooke, how very sweet of you to say that to me."

He turned back to the window, and again his face was serious. "Now I am going to spoil it all. I want to be frank with you, Gwen. Since we have been on this trip I have felt that all my years have been spent in the wrong way. I made up my mind that I would ask you for a divorce, marry Constance, and retire from public life. As you know, Constance fell in love with Ian. For a few days I did indeed think that I was living in the 'Waste Land.' Then my mind turned to other plans for the future, and I can honestly say

to you that I am happy things are as they are. I have been suffering and shall suffer more. You know that. I know that you will believe me when I tell you that my decision to marry Constance did not leave me entirely happy. I could not picture a life for me without you at my side, to help and encourage me."

Gwen cleared her throat of tears as she felt her husband's clasp tighten on her hand. "I seemed to have come to a 'Waste Land,' too, Brooke," she said finally. "Important things became unimportant. Convictions by which I had shaped my life were no longer convincing. When people reach such an impasse some let go and drown. Others cling to the wreckage. It makes no difference. Our privileged class will all be swept away, leaving younger people to struggle with our faults and virtues, our stupidities and accomplishments, our bungling and our success, above all with the prejudices we have bequeathed to them. From now one I shall follow you to the best of my ability. What are your plans, Brooke?"

"Let us sit down for a minute or two and smoke a cigarette while we discuss them." Brooke waited until they were seated and their cigarettes going. "First of all, I shall leave the party. That I must do. Then, Gwen, with your help, I want to start a small weekly magazine. You will likely lose money on it. In that magazine I want to write about everything that seems most crazy and ridiculous in this mad world. The things governments do are like an Alice-in-Wonderland dream. I want to write about that. I want to keep snipping at the miles and miles of red tape which are binding us more tightly all the time, so that before long we shall be helpless in our wrappings. The democratic governments are lost in a financial maze. We know now that when our leaders start down another path, so jauntily from which they do not even expect to emerge, they are only seeking a new point of departure. I want to write about these things in simple language, in a magazine cheap enough to make it available to the man on the street. There are one or two bright young chaps who would jump at the chance to help me. We shall

owe allegiance to no party, for all have their faults as well as their virtues. We shall be completely independent."

He looked up at his wife anxiously. "Do you think it could be done? It will cost a great deal of money. You may lose all that you put into it. It may never pay its way. Of course, there is the gamble that it will."

Gwen was sitting erect, her face glowing. "A wonderful idea, Brooke. Of course we can manage to finance it." He could see her interest and energy taking fire. "We shall sell the town house and take a little flat. That will save a great deal of money. It is not too far from our country place to drive in to the city and country living will be good for us. What an exciting adventure it will be! I am all impatience to get home."

"Oh, Gwen, you are so good." There was a catch in her husband's voice as he spoke the words. With all an Englishwoman's fear of an emotional display, she rose to her feet.

"I am going in to say good-bye to Constance now, Brooke. Thank goodness she dislikes saying her farewells in stations and on docks as much as we do. Those long pauses in conversation that take place, because everyone has already said all they had to say, are most awkward. I do wish I knew what is troubling the poor girl. You are sure you know of nothing, Brooke?"

"I give you my word, Gwen, not a thing. I noticed that something was wrong the very night that we left the Ranch, but when I suggested that she come home and think things over a little longer, she would not hear of it. She has made up her mind to stay."

When Gwen went into the sitting room to say good-bye to Constance the girl was sitting in a chair reading a magazine, which Gwen was quite sure she had just picked up. "She has been crying," Gwen thought. "How shall I ever get to the bottom of this in the time at my disposal." "Constance," she said in her abrupt way as she seated herself, "we have no time to beat about the bush. What is the matter? It is not

too late to change your mind. Do you want to come home with us? It can be arranged very easily."

Constance shook her head. "Nothing is the matter really. I guess I am a bit homesick and it is not easy to say good-bye to you and Brooke. Please don't worry about me."

"Do you still love Ian, Constance? Now that you have been away from him for a bit, have you any doubts about your love for him at all?"

"None, Gwen. There are no doubts. Without Ian life would mean nothing to me."

"Then it is just a little homesickness, as you say," said Gwen with relief. "Now," and her tone became brisk, "what about your little flat and the things in it? Shall I send the contents over?"

"I think not—just yet. If you would look after them for me I'd be so grateful. Perhaps you could have them packed and stored in the Sussex house for me. As for the flat, there will be no difficulty in sub-letting that."

"But why not have me send your things over, dear? It would be so nice for you to have some of them about you. It seems a pity not to use that beautiful old silver and furniture that came from your home."

Constance laughed. "Gwen, have you any idea what it would cost? The charges are dreadful these days. No, I don't even want the clothes that are there. You can find someone who will be glad of them."

"Just as you like, but I shall certainly send you some of your clothes. You will need them. And now I must go down to the lobby and pick up some cigarettes and magazines. We shall be leaving in a few minutes."

For a second they clung to each other and tears were in their eyes. "Gwen, I can't begin to thank you," whispered Constance.

"Shh, no thanks," said Gwen. "Remember, my dear, you always have a home with us. We must not let ourselves get soppy. This is not good-bye forever. You and Ian will be over before long."

She went out, polishing her glasses. As Constance turned, Brooke was standing in the doorway between the rooms. He looked at her, hesitated a moment, then came quickly to her and took her in his arms.

"What is the trouble, my dear one; what it is that is making you sad?" he asked.

"Gwen was just asking the same thing," laughed Constance, drawing away from him. "I guess that I am not as good at hiding my feelings as I thought I was. Everything is all right, really, Brooke. It is hard to see you and Gwen go. It makes me unhappy, but I do not regret my decision to stay. I could do nothing else."

"Because you love Ian?"

"Yes, Brooke, because I love Ian."

"Then there is nothing we can do for you, is there?" he smiled. "And now, my very dear, we must say goodbye." He cupped her flower-like face in his hands, and stooping, kissed her. She clung to him for a moment and he stood looking down at her, then spoke hesitatingly.

"Constance, about our relationship in the past? No regrets?"

She drew away from him and looked for a long moment into his eyes. "No, Brooke, no regrets. Our love has greatly enriched my life. I shall always cherish the memory of it. And you, no regrets?"

He smiled tenderly at her. "Not after those words, my darling. What I have had has been well worth suffering for now. I feared that remorse was troubling you."

"No, no, Brooke, don't think that. I am proud that you have loved me."

They heard Gwen come into the other room. Brooke looked at his watch. "Time we left. Come along to the elevator with us. Good-bye, darling, and be happy."

As the elevator started to move down Constance raised her hand in a farewell gesture and went back to the suite. Brooke had insisted on keeping it until the following night in order that Constance could have a good rest before taking the journey back to Alberta. She walked over to the window and

looked out. The rain had ceased. The mountain tops were tearing the clouds to rags. The foghorn persisted in its moaning. The girl put her hot face against the window. She was glad that she had not told these two dear friends what was troubling her. And how had it all come about?

She had started off so happily for her ride with Ian, that last day at the Ranch. It had stopped snowing, the snow lying on the damp earth like white icing on a chocolate cake. The unusual moisture in the air lay against her English skin, welcome and soft as silk. They had ridden about a mile, she chattering like a magpie from sheer happiness, when Ian leaned over and caught her horse's bridle. She could even now hear the jingling of their harness, smell the damp leather, as the horses moved restlessly. For the first time she noticed that Ian had been strangely silent.

"Constance, did mother tell you what was settled at Trevor's?"

Constance had laughed. "Well, darling, she said that she could not tell me. That you would do that this morning, but I must admit that she gave me a very good hint."

"Poor mother. She was so pleased about us, but she had a bad time of it, I'm afraid." Ian had hesitated for a moment. "Constance, now that everything has turned out so well for us, won't you do me one favour? Please stay on at the Ranch. Don't continue this trip with Sir Brooke."

Constance had turned to him, shocked. "We have discussed that before, Ian. I cannot do as you ask. It would be a very shabby thing to do. Brooke needs me, and I am going to the coast."

"Other men can get along without a secretary for a few weeks."

"You know that your remark is quite irrelevant," she said coldly. "The truth of the matter is that you do not trust me."

"I do," he had protested hotly, "but I want you to be sure of yourself. If you were willing to stay now and marry me immediately I would know that you were sure. I have rushed you into this."

"Ian, what is wrong with you; what has started all this?" she had asked him in distress.

"I don't know," he said frankly. "The man is so madly in love with you. He has everything. My darling, don't you see that I do not want you to make a mistake. The very fact that you can leave me now and go to the coast with them shows what a hold he has on you."

"You must be mad!" she had cried angrily. "If you are so uncertain of my love for you, then I think the wise thing would be for me to go home with them and take plenty of time to think it over. And that is just what I shall do."

"It might be a good idea at that," he said coldly. "Certainly there are some subjects that you are very sensitive about."

She had wheeled her horse about and galloped towards the Ranch. As she came near the buildings she had slowed him up and let Ian catch up with her, not wanting the people at the house to notice anything unusual.

"Darling," Ian had said as he helped her from her horse, "what is happening to us?"

"I am afraid it has happened, my dear. If this is the way you want it, I'm satisfied, too."

"Aren't you coming to say goodbye to Slim and Clem?"

"Oh, Ian," she had cried frantically, "go away, go away from me!" She had turned and run from him into the house. Shutting herself in her room the tears she had held back came. At first she was too angry to realize what it all meant. She had hurried about the room, putting things into her bag. Lady MacKenzie had come in and, seeing traces of tears, had thought that they had been shed because she was leaving Ian. She had talked of the wedding.

"We shall keep the town house until after you and Ian are married," she had said happily. "That house was just built for a wedding."

"Oh, no, Lady MacKenzie, please do not do anything like that," Constance had begged. "We want a very quiet wedding in the little church here. We shall talk about it when I come back. Promise me that you will do nothing yet about the wedding."

Lady MacKenzie had reluctantly agreed, but the fact that she had deceived Ian's mother had given her the idea of deceiving the others. She would go to the coast with Gwen and Brooke and say nothing. Her pride would not allow it.

She had not seen Ian alone after that. At every stopping place she had prayed, quite literally, that there would be a letter for her, but in vain. It would have been easy to get in touch with her, for Sir Brooke's name was in the papers constantly, with the names of the towns in which he was speaking.

There was only one explanation, Constance admitted to herself, as she stood looking down into the grey, foggy street. It was Ian himself that she was not sure of. And now, what was she to do? There was a money problem, too, but that did not worry her very much, although she knew of no one from whom she could borrow until she could make arrangements to get some from England, for she was sure that she could find a position. The wise thing to do would be to stay in Vancouver, but she longed for the clear air and the sunshine of Alberta.

There was a knock at the door and, thinking that it was the waiter to clear away the tea things, she listlessly called to him to come in.

"Constance."

She whirled about and saw Ian standing in the doorway. She flew into his arms, sobbing against his shoulder. Softly he shut the door and, picking her up in his arms, carried her over to the deep easy chair by the window.

"Darling, darling, to think that I could have done this to you," he murmured, rubbing his cheek against her bright golden head.

"Don't say anything, Ian, not for a few minutes," she said, trying desperately to stifle her sobs. "Just *be* here, that is all I want."

The man's arms tightened about her. At length she looked up at him, smiling. "What an ass I am making of myself," and drew herself up.

"You are the first woman I have ever seen who looks lovely when she cries," said Ian. "You are like a dew-drenched flower."

Constance laughed. "That, my dear, is the most poetic thing that you have said to me, but at least I am not stupid enough to take it seriously." She rose and walked across to the dressing table, where she began repairing the damage her tears had caused. He followed and sat by the table, looking at her tenderly.

"Darling, believe me when I say that I am sorry. You have had a grim time, haven't you? I have myself. I never want to live through anything like the past week again. I did not write because all that I could say in a letter was that I loved you and that I was ashamed of myself, and you knew that. I was sure that you had given me up as a bad job and I did not blame you. And jealousy was still gnawing at me. I tried to call it other things, but, of course, we both knew what it was and, as long as it existed, I could not make you happy. Will you believe me, dear, when I tell you that I have conquered it?" He smiled at her with anxious and unhappy eyes.

Leaning over, she took his face in her two hands and kissed him. "I have to believe you, my dear. When did you arrive? I was almost taking the boat with Gwen and Brooke, Ian. They knew that something was making me unhappy and they wanted me to go with them."

Ian chuckled. "That would never have happened. I was standing by, ready to kidnap you if necessary. At first, when I became sane again, I thought that, of course, there would be no use in coming for you and I certainly would not have blamed you for refusing to have anything more to do with me. Then, as it came nearer and nearer to sailing time, I became desperate. I telephoned into town and could not get a seat on the plane. Then by sheer luck I got one last night. It was running things very close and I became frantic lest we should be grounded. As soon as I arrived at the hotel I asked at the desk if Sir Brooke was still registered and learned that he was. What a relief! I asked if Miss Howard

was with them and they said that you would be here until tomorrow night, that you were not sailing with them. That gave me my first gleam of hope. I've been sitting in the rotunda, hiding behind a newspaper ever since, waiting until they left. Oh, Constance!" They were in each other's arms again.

"And now, sweetheart, we must make plans." Ian lit cigarettes for both of them and they settled down.

"Plans, Ian, just think of it, happy plans. And when you knocked at the door I was making plans, such lonely plans, with no Ian in them," cried Constance, glowing with happiness. "Well, what do we do?"

"I promised Trevor that I would see to some business for him and that, I'm afraid, will take the rest of the time until dinner. Then I shall come back here for you. I must also get our seats on the plane for home. How would it be if we stayed over until tomorrow night and had a long day together here? I'll rent a car and we shall go sightseeing. Find a nice little place in the country for lunch and dinner."

"It sounds heavenly, my darling. And after that?"

"Then home and married immediately. Mother is all a-twitter arranging the wedding. She had a 'feeling' that you would not go back to England, that you would be returning with me—and gaily went ahead with arrangements." He smiled. "Poor mother, she was so distressed when I told her that I thought you were going back with Sir Brooke and Lady Denton."

"But, Ian," cried Constance in alarm, "not a large elaborate wedding. I don't want that, dear, nor do you."

"No," laughed Ian, "I was firm about that. We are to be married in our own little church. Arthur is to be best man, Janet matron-of-honour, Trevor is to give you away, the bishop is to marry us and the guests will just be some of the neighbouring ranchers and very old friends."

"It sounds perfect. I want Clem and Slim at the wedding, too."

"They are the ones I shall be jealous of next," laughed Ian. "I tell you what, we shall have them for ushers. All

the boys will be at the wedding, of course, so we must give them a special place. Mother is already planning the decorations for the church and is getting all mixed up between a harvest festival and a wedding, and driving Arthur crazy. She has no taste in such things at all. Personally, I would rather stay out here and get married, with no one around at all. That, of course, we shall do, if you prefer it, but it will nearly break mother's heart. She is as happy as a cricket arranging everything."

"I am going to have the very best wedding a girl ever had," said Constance. "I would not have one thing different about it. The only thing that I could suggest in addition would be to have your great white bull, all decorated with red roses, drawing us to the church in an ox cart."

They both laughed, and Ian took her in his arms again. Their lips met in a long kiss.

"Constance," said Ian huskily, "do you realize what you are taking on, a new life entirely, lacking all the things that you have been used to?"

"Yes, Ian, my dear, I realize," she said seriously. "I shall be with you. I shall always know that that is worth any sacrifice."

"Then there are no regrets?"

"No regrets, my love. I am going home."

Date Due

CIRC MR19 '71

CIRC AP5 '71
APR 2 RETURN

CIRC JL23'71
JUN 9 RETURN

PS 8545 I285 F66 C-2
WILLIAMS FLOS JEWELL 1893-
FOLD HOME/

39559869 HSS

000010964047

901891

PS
8545
I285
F66
c.2

Williams, F. J.
Fold home.

CAMERON LIBRARY